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PALACE CULTURE OF LUCKNOW

AMIR HASAN

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AMIR HASAN

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For

My Dear Brother
Mr. Shabbir Hasan
Whose debt I cannot repay

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PREFACE

I do not belong to Lucknow but the city and its culture were imprinted on my mind even when I was too young to comprehend their significance. For me too, like all the Shias of this state or for that matter, of the whole subcontinent, Lucknow was a pilgrimage centre only a shade less sacred than the holy places in Iraq and Iran and a centre of Shia learning and culture unrivalled by any other city in India. However, as I grew up I almost forgot Lucknow in the wild country of the primitive people of U.P. with whose life-style, beliefs and rituals, I fell in love. It may not be flattering at all to Lucknowites and many exponents and admirers of Lucknow's culture to know that it was in course of this study of tribal life and lore that I rediscovered Lucknow. I was struck by a striking similarity between these two entirely different groups of people, one refined and highly sophisticated and the other rugged and uncouth, in their wishful thinking to preserve their traditional societies and in their nostalgia for their past.

This book draws heavily from travel accounts left by European travellers and from works of contemporary Urdu, Persian and English writers. Among them are many controversial writers like Sleeman, Suroor and Najmul Ghani. In my effort to give a total picture of the aspects I have dealt with in this book, it was not possible to ignore their works or completely discard them as partisan. I have covered subjects and mentioned facts which may be considered unpalatable by some. We have to bear in mind that Lucknow's culture grew under a set of circumstances—political, social, religious and sectarian—which were unique and unparalleled in more than one sense and which distinguished Lucknow and its rulers from the rest of the country and Indian princes. We have to take Lucknow as it was and look at it in its proper perspective.

My treatment of the subject is, in fact, in conformity with that of Lucknow's writers and autobiographers, be they kings or commonmen, who have exhibited frankness, and straightforwardness in describing events of their times and even facts of personal life. This itself constitutes a distinguishing feature of this book. I can safely say that this is the only work on Lucknow which has tried to portray certain aspects of the city in their totality by unearthing and sifting all possible material and documents.

I propose to study many more aspects especially the contribution of common folk like musicians, entertainers, sportsmen, cooks, calligraphers, artisans and the like in shaping this culture, in near future.

I hold forth no apology for highlighting the contribution of Shias of Lucknow in moulding this culture. Lucknow's cultural history since the beginning of the rule of Burhan-ul-Mulk till the abolition of Zamindari in 1952, revolves round this small

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Muslim minority which dominated the cultural and political scene throughout the Nawabi rule. In dealing with Shias, while I have tried not to be unfair to them, I have not been charitable to them either, I would not like to be quoted as a Shia writer because it would be unfair both to me and to the Shias of Lucknow.

It is my duty to thank Director Cultural Affairs U.P. Government for providing me with a financial support for this study and Director Stage Museum, Lucknow for making available a number of old and valuable photographs used in this book. I must clearly state that the views expressed in this book are entirely my own and in no way reflect those of the financing department or the Uttar Pradesh Government.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Syed Shabihul Hasan Naunaharvi, an eminent scholar and Professor and Head of the Urdu Department of Lucknow University, who guided me to a large portion of source material used in this book. My wife, Fatima Hasan who is an Urdu author in her own right, has helped me in my studies leading to production of this book. I also thank my daughter, Seemin, who has helped me in correcting the typescript and in preparation of the glossary.

25, Gulistan, Lucknow.

—*Amir Hasan*

1

LAKHNAU MY NAKHLAU

The Sky dare not separate me from Lucknow
Lucknow is in love with me, I am a lover of Lucknow
Where could you see likes of the colourful of Lucknow ?
Garden of roses and tulips are avenues of Lucknow
More colourful than roses are the thorns of Lucknow
Better than effect is the after-effect of the wine of Lucknow

The best way to describe Lucknow would perhaps be with apologies to Lucknowites-to liken it to an exquisitely charming courtesan who is highly sophisticated, elegant, well mannered and is a good conversationalist, has a fairly good knowledge of contemporary literature and topics of the day and is capable of satisfying the diverse and differing tastes and needs of her clients and admirers but at the same time, can cheerfully and coolly ignore or discard those on whom Fortune has ceased to smile.

No city can perhaps claim to have won a larger measure of love and loyalty from its citizens than Lucknow. What is in Lucknow that makes the Lucknowites love their city so passionately and madly? Who-ever is asked this question, would give this reply. It is the composite culture of Lucknow nurtured and developed during the Nawabi days whose "last phase" ended in early twenties but whose traces still linger on as anachronisms in some lanes and byelanes of Lucknow, which not only links and binds the Lucknowites with their city wherever they may be on the face of this Earth but also the outsiders who happen to come in its touch.

It is the story of this culture which we propose to narrate in the pages of this book with a view to acquainting our readers with elements of this culture which has won the hearts of Lucknow's citizens present or past irrespective of their caste, creed or class despite the fact that this culture was not exactly the product of the land where it prospered, but having been promoted by a small but powerful ruling minority which itself was not part of the mainstream of Avadh and above all, its rule was a short-lived affair ;

Avadh

The locale of this culture is Avadh which now constitutes two administrative divisions known as Lucknow and Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh. Geographically, the area lies between the river Ganges in the south and the Himalaya mountains in the north. During its hay-day, river Rapti formed the north eastern boundary. River Ghaghra almost bisects the tract. Rivers Ganges and Ghaghra almost have turned the main area into a fertile plain and a granary. The northern parts converge into Tarai in the districts of Gonda, Bahraich and Lakhimpur Kheri which are well known for their flora and fauna and in the past also for marshes and malaria. We have it from Valmiki that the area was ruled by the Surya Vansi Rajputs with Ayodhya lying on the banks of the Ghaghra, as their capital. We need not dilate on the story of Ramayana which is now a household word in India. Suffice to say that it was in Ayodhya, still in existence and situated near Faizabad at a district of 130 kms south-east of Lucknow, where in the forgotten past, Raja Dasrath instigated by his young and vivacious wife, Kekayi, banished his eldest son, Rama for a period of twelve years and where, on return, Rama ruled as an ideal ruler. Even to-day Rama-rajya is a byword for an ideal government.

Ayodhya in Sanskrit means 'unconquerable'. It is said that Avadh is derived from Ayodhya. According to another source, Avadh is from Avadhesh which was one of the names of Rama.[1] After the episode of Rama's banishment referred to above, Ayodhya was also called Avadh and gradually the whole kingdom of Rama became known as Avadh.[2]

According to a popular legend, after the fall of the Surya Vansi dynasty, the area relapsed into wilderness.[3] It was later occupied by the Tharus, a tribe of the Tarai and low caste Hindu communities like Arakhs, Pasis, Bhars, Kurmis and Muraos.[4] According to a local tradition, their principalities were under the suzerainty of a great Bhar dynasty which ruled from Bahraich till 1093 A.D.[5] The Rajas of Qanauj too made efforts to occupy Avadh but were not quite successful.[6]

Syed Salar Masud, a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni, is stated to have descended on Avadh in 1030 A.D. and led his army as far as Ayodhya. He is believed to have died at Bahraich in 1033 A.D. While his impact on Lucknow and Avadh was negligible, the very existence of this colourful and legendary figure now deified as Ghazi Mian, a house-hold word in central and east U.P. is doubted[7]. After Syed Salar had disappeared from the scene, Rajput clans like Bais, Gautams, Panwars, Solankis and Chauhans poured into Lucknow and adjoining areas and displaced the Bhars and other low castes. These Rajput princes consolidated their power between eleventh and fifteenth centuries.[8]

Muslim influence in Avadh begins with Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji's invasion in 1202 A.D. He is credited to have founded Bakhtiyarnagar near Malihabad and left behind some Pathans to settle there[9]. From 1394 to 1478 A.D. Avadh formed a part of Sharaqi Kingdom of Jaunpur. Around 1555, it was included in the Mughal Empire, then headed by Himayun. Later Akbar constituted a regular Suba of Avadh under a subedar (governor).

The system of Subedari under the Mughals continued till Ghaziuddin Haider, the fourth Nawab in the line of Burhan-ul-Mulk, broke ties with the Mughals and proclaimed independence under English instigation, more about it later.

Legends of Lucknow

The early history of Lucknow is shrouded in mystery although according to one legend, the city has existed since the days of Rama and his brother Lakshmana to whom the city owes its earlier name, Lakshamanpur. The high ground where now exists a mosque built by Aurangzeb was known as Lakshman Tila. It is said that on the top of the mound there was an orifice in the ground, at the bottom of which lived Sheesh Nag, the mythological thousand headed python who is supporting the world on its head. The devout Hindus, therefore, used to go there to offer flowers and water.[10]

Origin of the name Lakhnau is traced to a much later date. It is said, that there used to be a fleet of one lac boats in the river Gomti at Gaughat near the present city or there lived and worked one lac barbers. This gave the settlement adjoining the river, the name of Lakhnau, *lakh* meaning a lac and '*nau*' having a double meaning 'boat' or 'barber.'[11]

Then there is the legend of the city having been named after Lakhna, an Ahir (milkman). It is said that the Sheikhs of Neem-haharas so called from the neem trees surrounding their quarters, got built a fort by Lakhana Ahir. Gradually the settlement around the fort became known as Lakhanau.[12] The story of origin related by Agha Mahdi too revolves round Lakhana but the context is different and romantic. According to him, on the present site of Lucknow, there used to live two brothers Rahim and Rahman and their sister, Umat-ul-Zohra, descendants of Syed Ruknuddin, Shahabuddin, a vizir of Syed Salar. The Hindu raja of Malihabad demanded the hand of Umat-ul Zohra. Lakhna Ahir came to the rescue of the Syeds. As advised by him, the brothers ostensibly agreed to marry their sister to the Raja. When the marriage party arrived, the brothers and Lakhana along with his men, fell upon the baratis and averted the marriage. In gratitude the two brothers named the place after their friend in need.[13]

There is yet another version of Lakhana story. A dervish, Shah Qayamuddin came to India along with Mahmud of Ghazni and decided to have his abode under a tree near the place where now stands the Mosque of Bisatis in Mohalla Sindhi Tola. Lakhana, an issueless Ahir who used to graze his cattle in that neighbourhood, began to serve the saint. Blessed by the Shah, he had many children. He founded a village near the saintly abode, which the dervish christened as Lakhanu. The grave of the saint was in existence till the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider when one Meer Nazar Ali got it dug out and levelled the ground.[14]

To sum up, the earliest known name of the city was perhaps Lakshmanpur but was renamed or corrupted into Lakhnau during the Muslim period. While it is difficult to say when the town was actually named Lakhnau, this name was known even before Akbar's period.[15]

Many residents of this city fondly called it Nakhlau which is merely a corruption of Lakhnau.

History

As we have already shown, Lucknow has always been a part of the domain of Avadh but it remained obscure and neglected for long because it was Ayodhya which stood out as the most important town and capital of this territory. That is why even during Muslim rule prior to the reign of Akbar, historical references about Lucknow are very few and scattered. For instance, we find that in 1478, Lucknow was given by Bahlol Lodi to his son, Azam Himayun. In 1506, Lucknow was under occupation of Ahmad Khan, son of Mubarak Khan Lodi on whose deposition, Ahmad Khan was replaced by Sur Khan. Sher Khan occupied Lucknow and set up a mint for copper coins there.[16]

It was during Akbar's reign that Lucknow was chosen as capital of the suba of Avadh. Since then, Lucknow began to grow. The district of Lucknow was then called Sarkar of Lucknow in suba of Avadh. The pargana of Lucknow then known as Haveli Lakhnau, was in possession of the Sheikhzadas, Brahmans and Kayasthas. Among the governors of Lucknow during Akbar's rule were Husaini Khan Tukriya, Mahdi Qasim Khan and Jawahar Khan.[17] Prince Salim, son of Akbar, founded Mirza Mandi, a mohalla of Lucknow. Many mohallas south of Chowk, were added during Akbar's reign. Akbari Darwaza was constructed by Qasim Khan, an assistant of Governor Jawahar Khan.

It was in the reign of Jahangir that Sheikh Abdul Rahim gained importance in Lucknow where he was granted an estate. He built a small fort near the Lakshaman Mound which came to be known as Machhi Bhawan (Fish House)[18]. According to Sharar, the building was so named either because the owner had acquired the title of Mahi Maratib (Honour of the Fish) from the Mughal Emperor or because fifty-two fishes, two each on twenty-six arches, had been engraved in a portion of the fort.[19]

Sultan Ali, Shah Quli Khan ruled Lucknow as governor in Shahjahan's reign. His sons, Mirza Fazil and Mirza Mansur built Fazilnagar and Mansur-nagar respectively in the vicinity of the Chowk. During the same period, Ashrafabad, Musharrafabad and Gari Pir Khan were founded by three risaldars after their names.[20]

Aurangzeb paid a visit to Lucknow on return from Ayodhya and built a mosque at Lakshman Mound. Girdha Nag was Lucknow's governor during the reign of Mohammad Shah. His wife founded a mohalla known as Rani Katra.[21] In 1720 Burhanul Mulk who was appointed as subedar of Avadh established his dynastic rule in Avadh which came to an end in 1856. He, however, chose to shift the capital of the suba to Ayodhya where he built a new township which was first called Bangla and later named Faizabad during the days of Safdar Jung.[22] Faizabad is a large and flourishing town near Ayodhya in present times. Although Lucknow was neglected by the first two nawabs. Asafuddaulah not only moved to Lucknow and restored its past glory but also laid the foundations of a mosaic culture which forms the subject matter of this book.

When Asafuddaulah migrated to Lucknow, it was not more than a large village or a small town. It is therefore not surprising that the people connected with the darbar, left Faizabad with great reluctance and felt uncomfortable and miserable in Lucknow. Says Meer Hasan, a contemporary poet.

When I came to the precincts of Lucknow
I saw no splendour in Lucknow
On uneven land is located the town
The streets run up and down
Narrower and narrower is the lane
Through which air can pass with pain
Barring lumps of earth and water
I found every-thing else dearer.

But before long Lucknow was an entirely changed town. To quote Meer Hasan again.

Let Asafuddaulah live for ever
Who chose to live here
He removed all its crudities
And gave Lucknow a shape.

And Meer Taqi Meer, a poet of Delhi who had earlier reminisced

The ruins of Delhi were ten times better than Lucknow
I wish I were dead before I came to Lucknow.

was forced to change his opinion. He later exclaimed.

Lucknow is better than Delhi even
So my heart has wandered hither.

Asafuddaulah expanded the city by building new mohallas of Wazirganj, Amaniganj, Fatehganj, Rakabganj, Daulatganj, Begumganj and Nakhas.

Other localities sprung during his period were Tikaitganj built by his minister, Tikait Rai Khudaganj and Aliganj built by his mother, Hasanganj by his minister, Hasan Raza Khan and Kashmiri Mohalla, Balaganj, Chhaoni Hasan-ud Khan, Newazganj, Tahsinganj, Top Darwaza and Khiyaliganj.[23] It was in the period of Asafuddaulah that General Claude Martin came to Lucknow and became the Nawab's close confidant and adviser. He earned a huge wealth and built a palatial building[24] which later housed the La Martinier College.

Asafuddaulah built the famous Bara Immambara, in the Machhi Bhawan premises, Rumi Darwaza, the Residency and garden pavilions of Aishbagh, Charbagh and Yehiaganj.[25]

Saadat Ali Khan built a locality in the west of the town and named it Saadatganj after his name. Rastogi Mohalla, too, came in existence during his period. He also set up the markets of Rakabganj, Maqboolganj, Golaganj, Maulviganj, etc.[26]

Among the important buildings constructed by Saadat Ali Khan were Bailey Guard named after a Resident, Tehri Kothi, Lal Baradari, Dilaram, Dilkusha Palace, Darul Shafa and Khurshed Manzil.[27]

Ghaziuddin Haider built Badshahganj, obviously to commemorate the beginning of his kingship. The mohallas of Mahdiganj, Deorhi Agaha Mir and Sarai Agha Mir were set up by his nobles.[28] He also began construction of Ghaziuddin Haider Canal,[29] to provide irrigation to Lucknow. But the scheme flopped and the canal which still exists, is used as a drain.

His son and successor, Nasiruddin founded Ganeshganj and Changanj localities. He built an observatory (Tarawali Kothi) and equipped it with excellent instrument.[30] His minister Raushan-ud-daulah built a palatial building which was later used as court and called Kutchery Raushan-ud-daulah after his name.[31]

Mohammaed Ali Shah built a number of buildings such as Husainabad Imambara, Jama Masjid and Satkhanda,[32] which he could not complete. Still in existence, it is incomplete as his successors abandoned further construction fearing that the project was inauspicious.

Amjad Ali Shah laid the foundation of the present day fashionable market of Hazratganj. His minister Aminuddaulah built another important market of Lucknow, Aminuddaulah Bazar.

The last ruler Wajid Ali Shah built the Qaiserbagh complex between 1848 and 1850.[33]

A few words on the architecture of buildings of Nawabi era. While the Asafi Imambara along with the Mosque in its compound and Rumi Darwaza represent the declining Mughal style, later buildings were an awkward mimicry of the models then followed in England[34] or were inspired by the style adopted by General Claude Martin, a French adventurer. These copies of English and European styles were not always pleasant to the eye. From the days of Saadat Ali Khan, the architecture was neither national nor pure because of a twin government of the Nawab and the English. Chhatra Manzil specially was 'a flagrant example of western vulgarity in an oriental setting'.[35]

Thus within a period of seventy-five years, Lucknow was transformed from a large village or a small town into a large flourishing town. According to Bishop Hober[36] the population of Lucknow was around three lacs in the period of Ghaziuddin Haider. Egerton mentions five lacs as population of Lucknow in 1851.[37] Towards the end of the Nawabi rule, Lucknow was one of the most prosperous towns in India. The central part was very densely populated and the scenes on the principal streets were most lively. Mounted cavaliers in rich clothes embroidered with gold and preceded by attendants carrying spears and wands of office, passed to and fro in a continuous stream. Dignitaries seated in open palanquins richly painted and gilded, mingled in the throng followed by their armed retinue and occasionally with a mounted escort. Others perched aloft on the back of elephants were seated in gracefully, covered howdahs which were in some cases of silver.[38]

However, the fall of the Nawabi rule and events of 1857 played havoc with the fortunes of Lucknow. This is illustrated by the fact that in 1869, its population was only 2,84,779 which was further reduced to 2,61,323 in 1881. In 1901, it recorded a marginal increase of 11,705. Since then however, it has steadily increased.

The People

As we have already seen, before the advent of Muslims, Lucknow's population consisted of low caste Hindus like Bhars and Passis. Later Rajputs and Bahmans, too, became notable segments of its population.[39] From the beginning of the Muslim settlement in Lucknow till the establishment of Nawabi rule in Avadh, the Muslim population of Lucknow and surrounding areas, was mostly composed of the Sheikhs and Afghans, the former outnumbering the latter.[40] They were all Sunnis the Sheikhs who consolidated their position in Lucknow and neighbouring towns of Kakori, Khairabad, Gopamau, Pihani and Bilgram, were a force to reckon with when Burhanul Mulk made his debut in Lucknow as subedar.[41] Along with Burhanul Mulk and Safdar Jung came the Iranians who professed Shiism and the Turks who were Sunnis. They all settled at Lucknow and Faizabad. Thus the earliest Shias came to Lucknow towards the close of the first quarter in eighteenth century.

While no authentic figures of religious composition of Lucknow's population during Nawabi days, are available, there is no doubt that majority of them were Hindus and that among the Muslims, the Sunnis were more numerous than the Shias. There was a small but influential Christian population consisting of Britishers, Frenchmen, Eurasians, Armenians and Indian converts. After the fall of Avadh, the population of Muslims in general and Shias in particular declined. Things did not change even with the turn of the century. We find that the Muslim population had decreased from 21.51% in 1881 to 20.28 % in 1901. Similarly in 1881, the Shias constituted 23% of the Muslim population but 20 years later in 1901, their population declined to mere 14% of the Muslim population. In 1901, Christian population consisted of 1,152 Europeans (British subjects), 63 other Europeans, 734 Eurasians and 35 Armenians.[42]

Among the Hindus, Passis, Ahirs and Chamars were the predominant castes in that order. Lodhs and Brahmans too were in sizeable numbers. Other less numerous castes were Rajputs, Kurmis, Muraos, Kachhis, Koris, Kayasthas and Banias, besides small numbers of Khatris, Kathaks, Kalvars, Dhobis, Telis, Nais and Gadarias.[43]

Before we proceed to have a look at the Muslim "Castes" residing in Lucknow, we may mention the Kashmiris both Hindu and Muslims who were found in small number in Lucknow. According to a popular legend, Maharaja of Kashmir along with his retinue participated in the fabulous marriage celebrations of Wazir Ali, adopted son of Asafuddaulah. Some of the Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims liked Lucknow so much that they decided to settle at Lucknow. Among them were the shawl makers who were the original residents of Kashmiri Mohalla. Many settled in the localities of Rustam Nagar and Katra Abu Torab. Hindu Kashmiris produced some of the well known writers, poets, educationists and lawyers of Lucknow. The Muslim Kashmiris were mainly craftsmen, musicians and were employed to perform last rites among the Shias.[44]

Foremost among the Muslim castes inhabiting Lucknow were the Sheikhs who constituted nearly one-third of the Muslim population. They were descendants of the first Muslim invaders and claimed Syed Salar Masud as their ancestor. They asserted that they were the oldest Muslim settlers having come to the district in the 11th century. More than half of the Sheikhs were Siddiquis. Bulk of the remaining were Qurreshis, Usmanis, Faruquis and Ansaris were other sub-divisions found in small numbers.[45] The Pathans were about half of the Sheikh population. Yusufzais were most important among them. Others were Lodis, Ghoris, Bangash, Afridis and Rohellas.[46] Although the Syeds constituted only one-tenth of the Muslim population in Lucknow district mainly residing in and around the city, nevertheless they formed the largest concentration of Shias in U.P. Important Syed sub-divisions found in Lucknow were Rizwis, Abidis, Husainis and Taqwis. Others were Jafaris, Kazmis, Zaidis, Askaris, etc.[47]

The Mughals were nearly 7% of the Muslim population of Lucknow. The main sub-divisions found were Chughtais belonging to the house of Timur and Qizilbashes.[48]

The above were ashraf (honourable) Muslim castes. Among the other castes found in Lucknow, mainly converts from the low caste Hindus, were occupational groups like Julah as (weavers), Behnas (cotton dressers), Qassabs (butchers), Kunjaras (vegetable sellers), Faqirs (beggars), Gaddis (graziers), Darzis (tailors), Nais (barbers) and Doms, Dharis and Mirasis (musicians). Bhangis (sweepers) were converts from unclean Hindu castes.[49]

Burhanul Mulk, the founder of Nawabi rule in Avadh, was son of a Syed father and a Qizilbash mother.[50] No wonder these two Muslim subdivisions rose high and wielded great power during the Nawabi days. Incidently, the majority of Shias, belonged to these groups, although a large number of Muslims belonging to other sub divisions including Doms, Dharis and Merasis too adopted Shiiam which became a status symbol under the Shia rulers. Even the courtesans mostly recruited from low Hindu castes including Naiks of Kumaon Hills, embraced the religion of the rulers and completely merged themselves in Shia Culture.[51]

Like their counterparts in Hindu fold, the low caste Muslims too were anxious to join the ranks of the Muslim higher castes i.e. the ashrafs. Their efforts were much more successful than their Hindu counterparts because Islam recognizes no caste barriers and there exists no complicated system of degree of avoidance based on caste, sub-castes and gotras pertaining to marriage among the Muslims. During the Nawabi rule, the Syeds were not only highly respected but enjoyed many privileges and advantages. As a result, there were many imposters claiming to be Syeds who, when discovered, were disgraced.[52] According to Crooke, it is difficult to say how many true Syeds existed in Lucknow.[53]

The situation is humourously but aptly described in a Persian couplet.

Earlier I was a butcher,
Afterwards, I became a Sheikh
As grain has become cheap this year
I've become a Syed

It may be presumed that more or less the same pattern of caste structure as described above still exists among the Muslims, although there has been considerable change in the composition of Hindu population on account of influx of refugees from Pakistan, business classes and government servants.

Social Hierarchy

The King and the royal household naturally formed the apex of the social hierarchy of Lucknow. The nobility consisting of both army and civil officers and their descendants, privileged classes like descendants of previous Nawabs, Wasiqadars and guaranteed persons ranked next in hierarchy. The nobility was followed by landed aristocracy who had their estates in rural Avadh but residences in Lucknow.[54] Then there were the revenue officials of the king, the Amils and Chakledars who were posted in rural areas but maintained close links with Lucknow, the seat of power.

The Shurafa (gentry) formed what might be termed the middle classes. Among them were included the courtiers, middle level officials of the state, Ulema, theologians, Sufis, artists, traders and the like. Average Wasiqadars too were placed in this class.

At the lowest rung of the ladder were the Ghuraba or the poor classes which consisted of the menials, hangers on and serving classes. The artisans were a bordering group. Those who were well off, were included among the Shurafa whereas the rest who were not so well off, came within the poor classes.

The class which sustained the economy of Lucknow however, remained conspicuous by its absence in Lucknow. It consisted of the land tillers of the Kingdom of Avadh, who through an elaborate system of land revenue collection, filled the coffers of Avadh on which lived and thrived the King, the nobility, the Shurafa and the Ghuraba in Lucknow. It is interesting to note that except for the craftsmen, all other classes were either spenders or earners of wealth which poured into Lucknow from rural areas.

The distribution of wealth among these classes was naturally uneven. The main source of income of the King was land revenue which was around 1.5 crores of rupees annually. As in accordance with the Treaty of 1801, the Nawab had surrendered half of the territory to the British 'he paid no subsidy to the British, had no public debt and had all the revenues to himself.'[55] Most of the Avadh rulers spent lavishly and in this way, the money passed downwards. In the foot-steps of the King, the nobility and the landed aristocracy who too rolled in affluence, lived a luxurious life. The lower classes were not well off and many were indebted. However, because of affluence at the top and large kitchens maintained by higher classes, no one starved. If there were beggars, they were there by choice, having been tempted to easy life assured by the charity and munificence of rich citizens who considered it their religious duty to set apart a small part of their income for the poor.

Although the artisans were not rich, they were much better off than their brethern in the British territory because under the Nawabi rule, they were paid handsomely for articles of luxury by the king himself and his nobles who attended his darbar with a host of followers in their train.[56]

Similarly although the peasantry was exploited and tortured by the officials and the taluqdars, they enjoyed a happier destiny than the cultivators of the western part of the provinces and the Ganges-Jamuna doab.[57]

In this socio-economic structure, it is pertinent to point out that the Shias formed the most privileged class. They constituted the majority among the nobility and most of the remaining Shia population was included among the landed aristocracy and the gentry. They formed only a fraction of the lower classes, almost no one was tiller of the soil. The Sunnis and Hindus were the other constituents of the structure. While they were adequately represented among the gentry, they formed bulk of the lower classes, including the artisans. The peasantry was, however, overwhelmingly Hindu. The Shias, the elite of the society, had therefore no roots in the soil. Their social get-up was like a pyramid placed up side down. The royalty of Avadh was their prop. When the Nawabi rule came to an end, the Shia social set-up lost its support, with the result that chaotic conditions prevailed in Shia society in the post Nawabi period. However because of continuance of taluqdari and zamindari systems as well as pensions to Wesiqadars and others by the British, the aristocracy was able to maintain its standard of living but the economy of the gentry was badly shattered. According to Mukherjee, in the post Nawabi period, there were two classes of Muslims in Lucknow, the higher and the lower. There were very few Muslims in the middle classes. But even they preferred to identify themselves with the higher classes. But "their old carriage, rugged shawls and dilapidated houses" clearly spoke of their strait circumstances.[58] The lower class consisted of refugees from the higher and middle classes including Syeds, Shohdas, beggars of all description, menial servants and those following low professions, forming three-fourths of the Muslim population.[59] The last mentioned category consisted of mostly Sunnis. They worked as tailors, bakers, embroiderers, dyers and servants of Europeans. They were industrious like their Hindu brethren.[60] The Syeds and Shohdas who were mostly Shias, presented a miserable lot. It was noted that among the Syeds it was the women who supported the family by sewing and embroidering and also by their relationship with the rich.[61] The Shohdas had degenerated into thieves, cheats, gamblers and beggars. The last mentioned extracted money from the people by showering abuses. It was the business of the Shohdas to humiliate gentlemen and insult unguarded women, to oppress the weak and go about making noises.[62]

The rise and fall of the Shias is therefore, crucial to the study of Lucknow's culture which was cooked and processed in the crucible of Shia power.

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2

GROWTH OF SHIA POWER

Don't call them now viziers or amirs
In their nests, they are British prisoners
What they tutor, they utter
In fact Mynhas of Bengal are these amirs.

(*Juraat*)

Sunnis and Shias constitute the two main and major sects of Islam. The Sunnis or Sunnat-Jamaat are the traditionalists among the Muslims accounting for almost 70% of the Muslim world. They follow Imam Noman (Abu Hanifa), son of Thabet (Shafai) (80 AH-150 AH). Imam Mohammad, son of Idris (150 AH-204 AH), Imam Malik (94 AH-179 AH) or Imam Ahmad son of Hanbal, (164 AH-241 AH) in theology and are divided into sub-groups based on their adherence to a particular Imam. Indian Sunnis are, by and large, followers of Abu Hanifa although many Muslims in South India follow Imam Mohammad.[1]

The Shias constituting the other major sect, are much more scattered but much less in numbers than the Sunnis. The main features of Shiiam, can be summarised as follows :

(1) The Prophet was succeeded by twelve Imams. Hazrat Ali was the first Imam and Khalifa and Imam Mahdi is the twelfth and last Imam who is alive but is not visible to human eyes. He will, however, reappear before the Day of Judgement and fill the world with justice and peace.

(2) Hazrat Ali, his wife and Prophet's daughter, Hazrat Fatima, their sons, Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain and nine Imams who were descendants of Imam Husain, constitute Ahle Bait. The Quran and Ahle Bait together guide the Muslims who are expected to express their love and devotion for the Ahle Bait. On the day of Judgement, God will forgive the sins of such Muslims whose cases are recommended by the Prophet and his Ahle Bait. The persons who exhibited hostility to the Ahle Bait, have to be condemned.

Among them are included the first three Khalifas of Islam, namely, Hazrat Abu Bakar, Hazrat Umar and Hazrat Usman.

(3) It is proper and desirable to mourn the death of Imam Husain, his family members and companions at Karbala. Those who associate themselves with Muharram mournings, are entitled to be admitted into Jannat.

(4) It is meritorious to offer nazar and neyaz to the Fourteen Sinless (i.e. the Prophet, his daughter Hazrat Fatima and the twelve Imams) and other departed religious leaders.

(5) It is meritorious to visit the graves of the Prophet, Imams and Aulias.[2]

The Shias are divided into two main sects i.e. Twelve Imamians (Asna Asharies) and Seven Imamians. The former are found mainly in Irana, Iraq, India and Pakistan while the latter live chiefly in India and Yemen. Indian Bohras and Khojas are included among them.[3]

Wahabis or Ahle Hadis who are the puritans of Islam, are the third sect among the Muslims. This sect was founded by Mohammad, son of Abdul Wahab born in Central Arabia in 1691 A.D. The Wahabis believe in simplicity of Islam and interpret the teachings of the Quran with the help of traditions and private judgement. They do not recognize the four theologians of the Sunnis. Their main concentration is in Central Arabia but they are also found in small numbers in India.[4]

In addition to these three important sects, there are minor sects like Shaikis of Iran, an offshoot of Shias, the Mahdavis, a branch of Sunnis[5] and the Ahmadeyas or Qadianis.

SHIA, SUNNI DIFFERENCES

Differences between the two major sects i.e. Sunnis and Shias, arise from their diametrically opposite views on the issue of succession to the Prophet. While the Sunnis recognize and venerate the first three Khalifas, the Shias brand them as usurpers. According to Sharar, a Sunni author, Shia faith is based on two cannons—tawalla i.e. affection for the Ahle Bait and tabarra i.e. condemnation for the foes of the Prophet's family[6]. Interestingly, the Shias do not include the wives of the Prophet among the Ahle Bait. They specially denounce the role of Hazarat Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet and daughter of Hazrat Abu Bakar, the first Khalifa, who led a force against Hazrat Ali in Jange Jamal i.e. the Battle of Camels. The Sunnis on the other hand, hold the Prophet's wives in great esteem as Ummul Momneen i.e. Mothers of the Faithful. These opposing views adopted by the two sects, form the basis of antagonism between them. It may be germane to point out that there is no fundamental difference between the two sects in their views on martyrdom of Imam Husain whose sacrifice is reverentially remembered by Muslims of all shades and his opponents and murderers are universally condemned and their misdeeds decried by the Sunnis as well as the Shias. But even then, Muharram celebrations have been cause of tension between the two communities especially in Lucknow mainly because tabarra has somehow become linked with them in course of history.

In India an overwhelming majority of Muslims were Sunnis. As a matter of fact, it appears that only Sunni form of Islam was publicly practised during the Muslim rule. Shia sect was not given any official recognition by the Muslim rulers in India. The Shias had to follow Sunni (Hanafi) laws of inheritance, marriage and divorce[7]. They could not hold public prayers according to Shia tenets. No wonder many Shias did not disclose their true religion for fear of incurring displeasure of their employers and remained in taqay-ya.

The Mughals, however, adopted not only an attitude of tolerance towards Shias but many Shias rose to high positions during their rule. But even they did not consider it expedient to recognize Shiism publicly although it suited the early Mughals to have the Shia Kings of Iran on their right side. It may be recalled that Babar had maintained cordial relations with Shah Ismail of the Shia dynasty of Safawis in Iran and his son, Humayun was given shelter by Shah Tabmasp of Iran, who later helped him to regain the throne of India in sixteenth Century. Humayun is believed to have developed a soft corner for Shiism and show indulgence to Iranians who were Shias, in his court. Akbar and his contemporary Iranian ruler, Shah Abbas used to exchange presents. In fact good relations with Iran were continuously maintained till the reign of Shahjahan with the result that artists, poets, adventurers and soldiers who came to India from Iran, were received with open arms. Many held high ranks in the Court.

This policy of tolerance adopted by Humayun towards Shias was maintained by most of his successors including the last incumbent, Bahadur Shah who was even accused by some of his critics to have become a Shia. The fact of the matter was that once Bahadur became critically ill. On the advice of Mirza Haider Shikoh, a descendant of Shah Alam II, who was residing at Lucknow and had embraced Shiism, the Emperor was given Khake Shafa, i.e. dust of Karbala as a medicine. Either the Emperor himself or Mirza Haider Shikoh, vowed that on Emperor's recovery he would offer alms at the shrine of Hazrat Abbas at Lucknow. When the Emperor had completely recovered, he sent some money to Mirza Shikoh to fulfil the vow. The Mirza performed the ceremony with great pomp and show at the hands of the Mujtahidul Asr, Sultanul Ulema.[8] This led to the controversy referred to above. The Shias occupied important offices and positions during the Mughal rule. Names of Bairam Khan, Abu FazalFaizi, during the days of Akbar, Nur Jahan, Jahangir's consort and her family members, Niamat Khan Aali during the reign of Aurangzeb and Sayed Brothers (Husain Ali Khan and Abdullah Khan) during the days of later Mughals, can be cited by way of example. The fact however, still remained that Shiism was given no public recognition by the Muslim rulers or by the vast majority of Muslims in India.

RISE OF SHIA POWER IN AVADH

The down-fall of the Mughals and the growth of Avadh from subedari to vizierdom and later to kingdom, were the factors which helped the Shias not only to attain complete freedom of faith but to make their presence felt in the socio-cultural and political matrix of Avadh. It is therefore necessary to study the impact of rule and role of Burhanul Mulk and his successors on the history of Avadh in some detail.

The founder of Avadh dynasty was Mohammed Amin, a resident of Nishapur in Iran. He left Iran in 1708 to try his luck in India. After a brief sojourn in Gujarat, he came to Delhi where, with the help of Rai Ratan Chand, diwan of Qutbul Mulk Nawab Abdullah Khan, he was able to have access to the court of Emperor Farukhsiyar. He however, conspired against Qutbul Mulk and played a significant role in the liquidation of his brother, Syed Hasan Ali although he was a Syed and a Shia. He was rewarded by Mohammad Shah with the governorship of Agra and title of Saadat Khan Bahadur.[9] However, as he failed to contain the Jats, he was transferred to Avadh as Subedar in 1720. From this date commenced the history of Avadh as a Shia Muslim principality.

The entry of Saadat Khan into Lucknow was opposed by the powerful Sunni Saikh-Zade. There are two stories of the cunning exercise by Saadat Khan to overcome their opposition. According to one story, while encamping at Mahmud Nagar, he invited the Saikhzade to entertain them lavishly and while they were enjoying themselves, he sent his army to capture Lucknow and Machhi Bhavan, the stronghold of the Shaikhzade. The second story has it that before entering Lucknow, Saadat Khan enlisted the help of Sunni Shaikhs of Kakori and instead of entring Lucknow through Mahmudnagar and Akbari Gate where the Shaikhzade were waiting to give a stiff opposition, he quickly crossed the Gomti near Gaughat and took possession of Machhi Bhawan without any resistance. Riding on an elephant, he cut down the sword hanging at the gate, which, under the orders of Shaikhzade, had to be saluted whenever anyone entered Machhi Bhawan. The owners were made to vacate the Bhawan, and eat the humble pie.[10]

Saadat Khan, however, preferred to stay at Ayodhya but used to visit Lucknow now and then as it continued to be the Capital of the Suba. In 1722 he married his daughter to his nephew, Mirza Maqim and appointed him as his deputy. Having consolidated his position, Saadat Khan again began to involve himself in the politics of Delhi. He inflicted a defeat on the Marathas in the neighbourhood of Agra in 1737. In 1739, Nadir Shah invaded Delhi and it is stated that Saadat Khan went over to the side of the invader to humiliate Ahmad Shah, but committed suicide shortly afterwards.

As a Shia, Burhanul Mulk found it politically expedient to rely more on Hindus than Muslims. As Governor of Agra, he had Nilkant Nagar appointed as his deputy. Atma Ram was his Dewan in Avadh and Raja Lachhmi Narain was his Vakil at the Delhi Court.

On the intervention of Nadir Shah, Safdarjung, the son-in-law of Burhanul Mulk was appointed Subedar of Avadh by Emperor of Delhi.[11] He broke the strength of Shaikhzade further by occupying the building of Panch Mahal situated inside Machhi Bhawan which was rebuilt by him. The Shaikhzade were given seven hundred acres of land in two villages on the outskirts of Lucknow in compensation.

Safdar Jung had to go Delhi on the summons of the Emperor, leaving administration of Avadh in the hands of his deputy, Raja Nowal Rai. On Mohammad Shah's death, Safdar Jung was appointed Vizier by his successor Ahmed Shah. At that time India was being attacked by Ahmed Shah Abdali. The court of Delhi was however, badly divided into two groups, one of Iranians led by Safdar Jung and the other under the leadership of Muinul Mulk or Mir Mannu, leader of Turanis. Mir Mannu, ultimately defeated by Abdali, became his vassal.[12] Safdar-Jung who had hoped to drive away Abdali with the help of Marathas, became a victim of his own strategy as the Marathas became extremely powerful and he himself was accused of being pro-Hindu.[13] To his dismay, the Marathas were also not able to stop the onslaught of Bangash and Rohilla Afghans to Avadh. Although Safdar-Jung himself was defeated by Ahmad Khan Bangash, ruler of Farukhabad in 1750, he avenged his defeat, a year later and ultimately Ahmad Khan Bangash had to submit to the Vizier. The Maratha failure to help the Emperor against Abdali, precipitated a crisis giving an upper hand to anti Maratha and anti Safdar Jung lobby,[14] which was soon joined by the Emperor Ahmad Shah himself. Unfortunately for Safdar Jung, his opponents called upon all the Sunnis to collect under the Mohammadi banner to save the Emperor from Safadar Jung who was a rafzi and had attacked the Khalifa of the times.[15] Soon it took the shape of a Shia-Sunni conflict, in higher echelons and no surprise, most of Safdar Jung's Sunni supporters deserted him. The confrontation between the Emperor supported by Turanis, Afghans and Sunni groups of military men on one hand and his vizier supported by the Iranians on the other, which continued for about six months, was resolved by dismissal of Safdar Jung as Vizier and his reversion as Subedar of Avadh. He returned to Avadh in 1753 and died shortly thereafter in October, 1754 at Paparghat near Sultanpur. His remains were later removed to Delhi where an imposing tomb was erected over his grave.

Politically Safdar Jung had perhaps no option but to ally himself with fellow Shias and Hindus, his most trusted officers being Raja Ram Narain, his dewan, and Newal Rai, his deputy in Avadh, besides Raja Lachhmi Narain who continued to serve as his representative at the Imperial Court. However, although a devout Shia, he was no bigot in religious matters.[16]

Jalaluddin Haider Shuja ud Daulah succeeded Safdar Jung as Subedar of Avadh. He helped the Rohillas against the Marathas in 1757. In 1761 he sided with the Rohillas and Ahmad Shah Durrani to inflict a crushing defeat on the Marathas. In recognition of his services, he was appointed Vizier by the Emperor Shah Alam on the recommendation of Ahmad Shah Durrani.

A few years later Mir Qasim, Subedar of Bengal sought Shuja ud Daula's help against East India Company which was however, able to defeat the combined forces of Shah Alam, Shuja ud Daulah and Mir Qasim at Buxar, in 1764. The English followed this victory with another victory at Kura Jahanabad where they completely crushed Shuja ud Daulah although he was assisted by the Marathas and occupied the whole Suba. As a result of negotiations in 1765 at Allahabad, although he was able to get back most of his territory, Shuja ud Daulah had to pay a heavy penalty of Rs. 50 lacs to the Company, accept its suzerainty and allow stationing of a British Resident in his Capital. In 1768, he was forced to agree to a reduction of his forces to 35,000 only. With the help of the British, he defeated the Marathas at Ram Ghat in 1773 and occupied Rohilkhand the same year. He appointed one of his sons, Saadat Ali Khan as Governor of Rohilkhand. He could not enjoy fruits of his victories and died on 26th January 1775 when he was merely forty-two.

It would be noticed that Shuja ud Daulah reversed his predecessor's pro-Maratha and anti-Sunni policies with fruitful results. He was able to secure best terms even after his defeat at the hands of the British and later utilized them to defeat the Marathas and Rohillas and expand his territory.

Shuja ud Daulah was a devoted Asana Ashri Shia. He used to perform Muharram observances punctiliously. In course of the Third Battle of Panipat (1761) when he was camping with Ahmad Shah Abdali at Anupshahr, he observed Muharram and mourning rituals in his camp. Again, once summoned in the month of Muharram by Emperor Shah Alam the Nawab Vizier took along with him tazias and other ritual objects. He and his men wore black or green clothes and held majlises at night.[17]

Although in his earlier years, Shuja ud Daulah lived at Lucknow, he had no time to improve the town. After the Battle of Buxar, he shifted to Faizabad. Thanks to his interest in town planning, architecture, fine arts, trade and commerce, the city prospered and its population swelled. A large number of people, poets, artists, artisans, traders, and nobility migrated from Delhi and settled at Faizabad. The fame of parks known as Anguri Bagh, Moti Bagh and Lal Bagh which had beautiful lawns and abounded in flowers, reached even the ears of Shah Alam who, fascinated by what he had heard, came all the way to Faizabad to see Lal Bagh, the largest of all the parks.

The period of Asaf un Daula (1775-1797) son and successor of Shuja ud Daulah saw steep rise of British influence over Avadh. An English brigade was posted in Avadh at the expense of the Nawab. He felt out with his brother, Saadat Ali Khan whom he relieved of governorship of Rohilkhand and brought it under his direct rule and with his mother Bahu Begum from whom he extorted large sums of money by harassing and persecuting the old lady and her servants. In both the cases, he was actively assisted by the British who were able to slice away Banaras, Chunar, Jaunpur, Ghazipur etc. and bring them under their control and have the Nawab under their thumb.

With the British to take care of defence of Avadh, Asaf ud Daulah maintained a small army. Having been thus freed from worries of government, he gave himself to a life of love and luxury and diverted his attention to fine arts, architecture, literature, poetry and his legendary munificence.

Soon after his succession, he shifted to Lucknow which, henceforth remained capital of Avadh till the end of Nawabi rule, and later headquarters of the provincial government of the United Provinces during the British days and now continues to be the capital of Uttar Pradesh as the province was renamed after Independence.

Asaf ud Daulah was, however, a sad man because of the over bearing attitude of the British Resident and his frequent interference in his administration. He died broken hearted in 1797.

To express his devotion for Imam Husain, Asaf ud Daulah built the famous Imambara commonly known as Asaf ud Daulah Ka Imambara or Imambara-i-Asafi in 1784 and sanctioned an annual grant of three lacs of rupees for Muharram celebrations. He also built a caravan sarai and a canal from river, Furat (Euphretes) to the city of Najaf Ashraj in Iraq. He held Shia divine Maulana Dildar Ali in great esteem.

Asaf ud Daulah was succeeded by Wazir Ali who was, however, deposed by the Governor General, Sir John Shore only after four months on the grounds of illegitimacy in connivance with Bahu Begum, Asaf ud Daulah's mother and some British henchmen as alluded to in the following couplet :

Seven letters have upset this house
'Ts' three, 'As' two, 'H' and 'B' one each.

The three 'Ts' refer to Tafazzul Husain Kashmiri, Tahseen Ali Khan and Raja Tikait Rai. The two 'As' stand for Almas Ali Khan and Ashraf Ali Khan. 'H' is for Hasan Raza Khan and 'B' is for Bahu Begum.

Saadat Ali Khan, brother of Asaf ud Daulah who was living at Banaras (now Varanasi) in a state of neglect, was now the British choice as the ruler of Avadh. As usual the British were able to get many concessions from him. The amount of tribute payable to the Company was raised from 52 lacs to 76 lacs of rupees. Lord Wellesely forced on him an army for maintenance of which he was made to part with half of his territory in 1801. To cap it all, Major Baillie, the Resident made it a point to interfere in his day to day administration and bring the Nawab down in the estimation of his own subjects. It was only towards the fag end of his rule that Lord Hastings cautioned the Resident against day to day interference but the Nawab died shortly afterwards in July 1812.

Saadat Ali Khan was a fair minded, sagacious and competent ruler. He effected improvement in administration and economy in expenditure. He was a patron of art and literature and had a good sense of humour. Mir Taqui, Mir Mirza Qateel and Insha were some of the important poets who were patronised by him.

Saadat Ali Khan was followed by Chaziuddin Haider who ruled Avadh from 1812 to 1827. He gave a loan of 1.50 crores of rupees to Lord Hastings, the Governor General. In 1819 Ghaziuddin Haider crowned himself as King of Avadh at the instigation and with the approval of the Governor General, thus breaking the nominal tie of subordination to the Mughal Emperor. According to the District Gazetteer he received the 'title' of King from Marquis of Hastings. Prompted by the British he sent his proclamation of Kinghood and a newly struck coin to the Court of Emperor of Delhi to add salt to the cut. Pat came the reply in the form of a Persian couplet ;

Thanks to Sky's atrocity coins have been issued
By Ghazi Uddin Haider, the treacherous King.

Ghaziuddin Haider died after a 'reign' of eight years in 1827.

According to Sharar, it was during the rule of Ghaziuddin Haider that the Shia faith became an important element of the Government. This led to ascendancy of the Shia Mujtahids and fall of Sunni Maulvis of Firangi Mahal in the Avadh darbar.[18] Ghaziuddin Haider built Qadam Rascol and Shah Najaf, a replica of Hazrat Ali's Mausoleum in Iraq which also became his own tomb. He established a press which published a number of books on Shia theology and set up a School of Eastern Learning. His queen, Badshah Begum was a very devout Shia. She initiated many rituals and innovations which have been dealt with elsewhere. His Prime Minister, Agha Mir, too built a Karbala.

Nasiruddin Haider who was a youth of 25 years, succeeded Ghaziuddin Haider in 1827. He was given to debauchery and a life of reckless pleasure and vulgarity. In his regime, the British Resident took the unusual step of confining the Prime Minister of Avadh, Mutamad Ud Daula in the Residency and got him dismissed although he was later censured by the Governor General for this uncalled for interference.[19] Although Nasiruddin completely neglected the administration, he was lucky to have Lord William Bentinck as Governor General who did not take any precipitate action despite adverse reports from the Resident and instructions from Home Authorities.[20]

The hillarious and wild rule of Nasiruddin came to an end in 1837 when he met a premature death, allegedly poisoned by his Kahari, Dhania.[21]

Despite his leading a life of pleasure and licentiousness, Nasiruddin was devoutly attached to his religion. However, he made many innovations to suit his own taste and life style with the support of his overzealous mother, Badshah Begum. He observed Muharram celebrations and rituals with gusto. He stopped all entertainments and drinking from first of Muharram to 21st Safar. He did not even hold darbar during this period.[22] According to Suroor, the King slept on the ground till Chehulum, wore white and black clothes, cried in anguish and spent thousands of rupees on celebrations. He heaped favours on marsiya reciters, syeds and the poor.[23] He himself wrote marsiya and qasida in praise of Hazrat Ali and his descendants. He built up a Karbala in Iradatnagar now in ruins which also accommodates his grave. Nasiruddin, however, did not pull on very well with the Mujtahidul Asr, Maulana Syed Mohammad who did not issue fatwas in some cases to his satisfaction. But the Maulana had grown so powerful by that time that he could not do anything against him. On his refusal to meet him, the King ordered that his house be gunned. When the orders were conveyed to Nawab Maqbool Ud Daulah, officer in charge, he mounted one gun facing the Maulana's house and another in front of the palace. On enquiry, the King was told that it was done under orders of Nawab Maqbool Ud Daulah whose faith in religion did not allow him to gun down the house of the Spiritual King and let the palace of the Temporal King remain intact. Thereupon the king cancelled his orders.[24]

After Nasiruddin's death, Badshah Begum unsuccessfully tried to put Munajan, allegedly an illegitimate son of Nasiruddin, on the throne. The British, however, arrested both of them and despatched them to Chunargarh where they remained confined till they died. The British chose Nasiruddaullah Mohammad Ali, an old man of 63 and a son of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan as the next King. In return for the favour conferred on him by the British, the new King signed a fresh treaty in 1837 under which the King agreed to maintain a new auxiliary force to be officered by Englishmen at a cost of 16 lacs of rupees per annum and to use force only with the concurrence of the Resident. It was also agreed that in case any part of Avadh was mismanaged, the British would be free to segregate it and place it under their administration to be restored to the King after the administration had improved. Although this treaty was not approved by the Board of Directors, the King was never informed of this in clear terms. In fact later during Wajid Ali Shah's reign, Lord Dalhousie made this dead treaty a basis for annexation of Avadh.[25]

Despite being old, crippled and rheumatic, Mohammad Ali Shah worked hard to reform the administration of the Kingdom. He improved the finances of the State by effecting economy where ever possible. One good feature of his period was that he was least bothered by the British Residents Col. Low and Caufields who pulled on very well with him. After a peaceful and uneventful reign of 5 years, Mohammad Ali breathed his last in 1842. Mohammad Ali Shah was a devoted Shia but was no fanatic. He constructed a rest house at Bombay for pilgrims to Karbala and Haj. He used to give stipends to pilgrims belonging to Lucknow facing financial stringency in Karbala at the rate of Rs. 5. per head. He fixed a sum of Rs. 1,000 per month for the purpose. He also reconstructed the gate of the tomb of Hazrat Abbas at Karbala. In Lucknow he constructed the famous Imambara of Husainabad and the imposing mosque nearby.[26] He restored the prestige and position of the mujtahids at the darbar which had received a setback due to attitude of Nasiruddin Haider.

On Mohammad Shah's death, his son, Amjad Ali Shah ascended the throne of Avadh in 1842, at the age of 41. He took keen interest in the affairs of the State and led an austere life. Suroor's accusations of favouritism, nepotism, alround corruption and lawlessness against him are certainly exaggerated but are not wholly untrue.[27] He had sharp differences with the British Residents who unduly intervened in internal matters. That their interference was highly unprincipled, can be judged from the fact that while Col. Shakespeare pressed for replacement of the Vizier, Ammen Ud Daulah, his successor Davidson opposed any change in the ministry because the Vizier had shifted his loyalty to the new Resident. Amjad Ali's reign came to an end with his untimely death in 1847.

Amjad Ali Shah will always be remembered for founding Hazratganj, the fashionable modern shopping centre of Lucknow. In this area is also Imambara Sibtainabad built by Wajid Ali Shah over the grave of Amjad Ali Shah.

Amjad Ali Shah was a maulvi, a devout Shia and a follower of Shia religious leaders.[28] His period saw the climax of the ascendancy of Shia Ulema who were closely associated with administration. It is germane to examine here the various measures taken by

Amjad Ali Shah to strengthen the position of Shia Ulema in particular and Shias in general.

He set up an Institute of Shia Theology called Madarsai Sultania (Royal College) in 1259 AH, which was originally accommodated in the mausoleum of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and later shifted to Imambarai Asafi. It was under the management of Mujtahidul Asr whose nephew Maulana Syed Mohammad Taqui was appointed principal. Students were given monthly scholarships ranging from Rs. 4 to Rs. 9. The teacher's salaries varied between Rs. 20 and Rs. 100. The School had a boarding house consisting of ten rooms under the charge of Mufti Mir Mohammad Abbas.[29] The total expenses on this institution amounted to Rs. 2600 per month.[30] The College was abolished by the British after annexation. The establishment of this institution is of historic importance because it put an end to study of Shia boys in the Firangi Mahal, the School of Theology of Sunni Ulema.

Amjad Ali Shah made some basic and fundamental changes in the judicial administration by placing it almost entirely in the hands of Shia Ulema. He set up a department called Mohakmai Marafai Shari under Sultanul Ulema, the Mujtahidul Asr. The Mujtahidul Asr presided over the highest court of appeal in civil and ecclesiastical matters. He had original jurisdiction in certain civil matters like suits from interior parts of the State, matrimony, distribution of charity, registration of documents regarding mortgage, reduction of civil taxes and criminal matters like murder.[31]

Maulvi Syed Baqar, son of Sultanul Ulema was appointed head of Adalate Alia or High Court of Judicature. This set up originated by Saadat Ali Khan to decide civil cases, was expanded during Amjad Ali Shah's reign to bring in its purview cases relating to sale or mortgage of houses and gifts, succession and appeal in criminal cases.

The dominion was divided into 12 divisions each under a Mufti belonging to Shia sect. Their pay ranged between Rs. 60 to Rs. 150. Appeal against the orders of Mufti lay to Adalate Alia.[32]

Amjad Ali Shah established yet another department Mohakmai Sadrul Shariyat i.e. Department of religious Affairs under a Shia Maulvi, Syed Mohammad Hadi to impart instructions in matters of namaz and other tenets, according to Shia School.

According to Bhatnagar,[33] Amjad Ali Shah forbade the Sunnis and Hindus to write the names of God, the Holy Five and the Imams. A large number of Shias were appointed in every branch of administration to write the holy names.

The High Priest was made responsible for distribution of Zakat i.e. charity fund created by the King by earmarking 2.5% of the annual revenues of the State for distribution among the poor, which came to 3 lacs of rupees.[34] This system of distribution through the High Priest ensured that Zakat was disbursed mainly to the Shias. Sleeman castes doubt on the integrity of the High Priest and his relations in the management of this fund. According to him, to overcome the ban on Syeds to accept Zakat except to pay debts, they used to borrow large sums and thus entitle themselves for Zakat. The High Priest also sent large sums to his friends at court for distribution among the needy. As a result even among the Shias, only a small portion of the total fund was actually distributed.[35]

The High Priest was also made head of the Excise Department to effect strict prohibition. A poet said humorously;

Over Excise presides the High Priest
To Hell goes he who does not drink !

All these measures made the Mujtahidul Asr and his group of Ulema very powerful and for the most part of the short reign of Amjad Ali Shah, they ruled Avadh both spiritually and temporally.

Although Amjad Ali Shah was a staunch Shia who ran his government under the dictates of Shia Ulema and appointed a large number of Shias to key positions in administration, it would be erroneous to suggest that he forcibly converted Sunnis and Hindus to Shiism. The much cited case of Jagan Nath Agarwal who became Sharfud daulah Ghulam Raza Khan and a Shia to escape payment of dues only shows that inducements were available to those who wanted to become Shias. It is quite likely that several people took advantage of this.

To sum up, Amjad Ali Shah bestowed a Shia look to his administration. Shia Ulema never had it so good. They wielded their influence in spheres hitherto beyond their purview. The king openly patronized and favoured the Shias. The period of Amjad Ali Shah certainly saw the climax of Shia power. It is a different matter that in the process, he must have alienated a large section of his subjects.

FALL OF NAWABI

Wajid Ali Shah ascended the throne as the last King of Avadh on the death of his father in 1847 at the age of 24. Although pleasure loving since his early youth, Wajid Ali Shah made some efforts to tone up administration and reform the army.

Appointment of Col. W.Sleeman, as Resident in 1849 was a turning point in the history of Avadh because Governor General, Dalhousee had sent him to Avadh only to assist him in annexation of Avadh to the British Empire. Col. Sleeman reduced the King to the status of mere taluqdar who had to seek approval of his actions from the Resident whose authority seemed to cover everything. Wajid Ali Shah could not shift his royal throne from one place to another because the Resident did not approve of it.[36] He had to remove and exile his men on the dictates of the Resident. The Resident throwing all niceties to wind, undertook an extensive tour of Avadh at the cost of King's Exchequer and openly invited complaints against the administration. He submitted a long report[37] against Wajid Ali Shah and his administration to Governor General in 1850. It was however, left to his successor, General Qutram to take credit for the final report on Avadh which he submitted in March 1855 within four months of his arrival sealing the fate of the dynasty of Burhanul Mulk for ever, Wajid Ali Shah was finally deposed in 1856 by the British without shedding a drop of blood. Amidst all round gloom, he left Lucknow on 13th March 1856 to represent his case personally before the Governor General and petition the British Queen personally if necessary. On reaching Calcutta, he settled at Matia Burj. He sent a deputation to England under his mother, Malika Kishwar and younger brother Mirza Sikander Hashmat who however, failed to regain for him the Kingdom of Avadh. Wajid Ali Shah ultimately breathed his last at Matia Burj in 1887 after a span of 21 years as a British pensioner.

To complete the story of the Avadh dynasty, during the freedom struggle of 1857, Wajid Ali Shah's 11 year son, Birjis Qadar was crowned at Lucknow in July 1857 and reigned with his mother, Hazrat Mahal as his regent till March 1858 when both mother and son had to flee Lucknow as it was recaptured by the British.

Thus came to an end the Shia rule of Burhanul Mulk's dynasty.

Despite his weaknesses for women and love for music Wajid Ali Shah was a devout Muslim. He was a tetotaller. He said his prayers regularly and fasted during the Ramzan.[38]

Wajid Ali Shah like his predecessor, was also a strict follower of Shia faith. Not only he took part in Muharram observances but he also composed nauhas and marsiyas. He maintained the Lucknow spirit of Muharram at Matiaburj too where he constructed Imambaras, Karbalas and Durgahs on Lucknow pattern. According to Sharar, the pomp and show of Muharram processions and celebrations at Matiaburj were even greater than those of Lucknow during his days. In any case, Matiaburj celebrations far surpassed those of Lucknow during post Mutiny period.[39]

Wajid Ali Shah did not make any important changes in the administrative pattern which he had inherited from his father with the result that the dominance of Shia Ulema continued during his reign also. At Matiaburj his affairs were however, mostly managed by Sunni Muslims. His Vizier, Munshi ul Sultan (Chief Secretary), Bakshi (Pay master) and officers incharge of Imambaras and Muharram arrangements were all Sunnis. In fact Wajid Ali Shah did not distinguish between Shias and Sunnis at all and often said "Of my two eyes, one is Shia and the other is Sunni."[40] According to Bhatnagar, although Wajid Ali Shah was not a fanatic, he was partial to the Shia sect. He further adds that he had a dislike for Sunnis.[41] His opinion is, however, sweeping and based on incorrect appreciation of facts. Bigotry was never a weakness in the character of Wajid Ali Shah. He however, did not deviate from the time tested pro-Shia policy adopted by his predecessors and did not disturb the arrangements which allowed a free hand for Mujtahidul Asr as a matter of expediency. However, when out of power, he treated Shias and Sunnis with perfect impartiality.

Summing up the policy of Shia rulers of Avadh, it may be stated that with the possible exception of Shuja Ud Daulah, all the Nawabs and later Kings of Avadh followed a state policy which was essentially pro-Shia and pro-Hindu and in a large measure anti-Sunni. This was based on pragmatism and prudence. It proved expedient and paid them desired dividends. It must be remembered that earlier Nawab-Viziers had found out that they could not expect anything other than bitter opposition from Sunni coterie that surrounded the Mughal Emperors and that they could survive only with the help of Hindu friends including the Marathas. The Mughal Emperors themselves always followed a pro-Sunni policy and the Sunnis treated them as Khalifai Waqut (Khalifa of the time) and stated so in Khutbas after Friday prayers. The Shias were not recognised by the State and could not pray according to their tenets publicly in mosques. In fact, a large number of Shias preferred to remain in taqqaya and outwardly profess Sunni faith. Humayun and Bahadur Shah Zafar who seem to have developed a soft corner for Shias, could not express themselves freely for fear of adverse reaction from nobility and Ulema. Establishment of Shia rule in Avadh was, therefore, not at all welcome to Sunni nobility. Under such a climate then prevailing, the Shia rulers cannot be blamed for seeking friends among the Hindus and for encouraging Shia nobility. However, knowing very well that majority of Muslims of Avadh were Sunnis, they did not do anything to suppress the religious freedom of the Sunnis. The Shias, on the other hand, not only got unfettered freedom to practise their religion but openly practised with vengeance such aspects of their faith which were not at all palatable to the Sunnis and created tension between the two groups of Muslims, which have outlived not only the rule of the Nawabs but also the rule of the British. The Shia rulers with the exception of Amjad Ali Shah, however, maintained an attitude of impartiality and tolerance towards Hindus and Sunnis.

WASIQA

The story of Shia ascendancy during the rule of the Nawabs would not be completed without a description of Wasiqa which helped to sustain Shia nobility and maintain Shia institutions even after fall of Avadh. Wasiqa is a political pension paid to descendants of Avadh rulers and others under an arrangement entered into between the East India Company and a member of the Avadh royal family. The Wasiqadars (endowment holders) came from the following classes :

1. Descendants of the royal family.
2. Relations.
3. Servants and other dependants.

This endowment arrangement also covered maintenance of certain Imambaras.

The pension paid to relations, was termed amanat and that to dependants and servants who mostly came from the home district (Naushapur in Iran) of Nawab Saadat Khan was called zamanat.

The Wasiqa funds accrued in the following manners :[42]

(1) Bahu Begum, wife of Shuja ud Daulah executed a deed in 1813 with the East India Company under which she delivered a sum of money and property to the latter to give pension to some of her relations and dependants. The income from the assets handed over to the British by Bahu Begum amounted to Rs.10,000 yearly during her days.

(2) Mahal Wasiqas were provided for families of Mirza Ali Khan, Qasim Ali Khan and Salarjung.

(3) Wasiqa was also paid out of interest on loan given to the East India Company by the following rulers to their nominees.

(i) Ghaziuddin Haider gave or was rather forced to give a number of loans to the British between 1814 and 1825. The East India Company was able to extract a total sum of about Rs. 3.5 crores from him. It is however his last loan of Rs. one crore that he gave to the British in August 1825 at an interest of 5% per annum, which provided for maintenance of his following four Begums as well as Shah Nazaf.[43]

Mubarak Mahal	Rs. 10,000 per month
Mariam Begum	Rs. 2,500 per month
Sarfaraz Begum	Rs. 1,000 per month
Mumtaz Mahal	Rs. 1,100 per month

In case of the Begums' death their nominees were entitled to only one-third of the pension and the remaining two-thirds were spent on the various religious and charity works, Karbala and Najaf Ashraf. The pension of Mumtaz Mahal was, however, terminated on her death.

(ii) In 1829, Nasiruddin Haider gave a loan of Rs. 62.40 lacs to the East India Company at an annual interest of 5%. The interest on this sum was to be used to provide monthly allowances to his following wives.[44]

Malka Zamania	Rs. 10,000 per month
Nawab Taj Mahal	Rs. 6,000 per month
Nawab Mukhadra Alia	Rs. 6,000 per month

He also sanctioned a monthly allowance of Rs. 4,000 to Nawab Sultan Alia, daughter of Malkai Zamania from a previous husband. All these allowances were hereditary and were transferable to nominees if a Wasiqadar died heirless.

(iii) King Mohammad Ali Shah handed over a sum of Rs. seven lacs in 1838 to provide Wasiqas to his begums, descendants and other dependants from the interest on this sum.[45]

(iv) Amjad Ali Shah during his five years rule gave loans totalling 38 lacs of rupees to the British yielding an interest of nearly Rs. 10,000 per month which was divided between 13 persons including his chief queen Malkai Kishwar who was given an allowance of Rs. 2,000 per month and his son, Mirza Sikandar Hashmat Bahadur who got Rs. 500 per month.

(v) Mohammad Ali Shah left a sum of Rs. thirty-six lacs in endowment to manage the religious institutions as well as celebrations and observances in connection with Muharram and other occasions at Husainabad Imambara constructed by him, Imambara of Asaf ud Daulah and tomb of Saadat Ali Khan. The Jama Masjid which was completed by his widow Nawab Malkai Jahan during the reign of Amjad Ali Shah, was also included later in this arrangement.

(vi) In November 1846, Amjad Ali Shah handed over to the British a sum of eighteen lacs and thirty thousand rupees to be invested in government notes in the names of his wives and other female relations who were entitled to receive interest on the sums invested on their behalf.[46]

The British enacted an Act in 1878 to manage this endowment. According to the District Gazetteer, the income of the trust, was utilized for the up-keep of buildings, observance of Muharram and other festivals, maintenance of Husainabad High School, Arabic School, Primary Schools and dispensaries etc. Total income of the Trust was over 1.5 lacs of rupees per annum.[47]

POST NAWABI PERIOD

It was due to these financial arrangements made by the rulers and begums of Avadh that even after the end of their rule, many of their descendants and other Wasiqa holders were able to live a life in conformity with their status. In fact the Wasiqa has been a status symbol because being a wasiqadar meant that either a person belonged to the royal family or was close to it. In this way, the wasiqadars formed the hard core of the Shia nobility of Lucknow. Later because of large number of inheritors, wasiqas were reduced to negligible amounts. In a large number of cases where it was less than Rs. five per month, the Government made a lump sum payment equal to the total wasiqa accruable in 20 years as final settlement. As such in present time, the wasiqa continued to be a status symbol rather than of any real financial benefit to the wasiqadars in most cases.

GUARANTEED PERSONS

The Guaranteed persons came from the following categories :[48]

(1) Widows of Ghaziuddin Haider and Nasiruddin Haider.

(2) Bahu Begum's relations and dependants, families of her brothers, widow of Wazir Ali Khan and nephew of his father-in-law and dependants of Shamsunnisa Begum (consort of Asafud Daulah).

(3) Scions of the royal houses of Persia, Delhi and Farrukhabad.

(4) Former Ministers and deputies of past Avadh rulers who were close to the British and had brought about material gains to them.

(5) Other officials of Avadh Government who had supported the British.

(6) Pensioners of the East India Company who were Residents of Avadh.

(7) Indian Officials and functionaries connected with the Residency.

(8) Certain Vakils or agents of dignitaries who attended the Resident.

(9) All public and private servants attached to the Residency.

(10) Occupants of certain houses in the vicinity of the Residency.

Thus, it would be seen that the guaranteed subjects also included wasiqadars. These persons claimed British protection and openly defied Avadh rulers. The guaranteed subjects formed an important class among themselves. While they belonged to all communities, it can be safely stated that majority of them were Shias. Thanks to British patronage, they considered themselves above the laws of the land. Many begums of Ghaziuddin Haider and Nasiruddin Haider carried over illicit love affairs openly or clandestinely but it was not possible for Avadh rulers to effectively contain them as the Resident intercepted on their behalf. No wonder, the downfall of Avadh dynasty had no adverse effect on them. In fact, having been in good books of the British, their prestige, social status and influence were greatly enhanced during the early days of post Nawabi period and it is no surprise that they were considered among the elitist.

TALUQDARI AND ZAMINDARI

Another institution that helped the Shias to hold on to power after Nawabi period, was the taluqdari system of revenue collection introduced by the Shia rulers. The word taluqa is a derivative of the Arabic root alq implying connection or dependence. Before 1869, this term was applied to every opulent zamindar who would pay land revenue direct to the State. Act I of 1969, however, defined a taluqdar as a person whose name had been entered in the list of taluqdars published by the Government under Section 3 of the Act. Many of these Taluqdars were Shias and were able to be opulent and powerful till the end of Zamindari in 1952 as we would shortly see.

To understand the nature of tenure in Avadh, let us have a look at the revenue administration during the Nawabi days. According to Bhatnagar, there were the following three methods of revenue collection in vogue in Avadh.[49]

(a) Huzur tahsil
(b) Ijrah
(c) Amani

Under Huzur tahsil, the landholder directly paid rent to the State which appointed a special officer for the purpose. Under the Ijrah or contract system, the State entered into a contract with a person to pay a fixed sum for a specified period.

Under the Amani system, the State appointed amins and other subordinate staff who assessed the demand at a rate varying from six annas (37.5%) to eight annas (50%) in a rupee. As the contractors under the Ijrah system, for obvious reasons, extracted maximum possible revenue from the cultivators who were harassed in diverse ways, Ghaziuddin Haider, Nasiruddin Haider and Mohammad Ali Shah under instructions of the Governor General tried to change the Ijrah system into amani but did not succeed, mainly because the officials of the State appointed to realise revenue under amani system, were currupt. The result was that the contractors who were known as taluqdars, came to stay. During the reign of Wajid Ali Shah the number of taluqdars was about 200[50] out of which 78 were Muslims and held 65% of the holding in Avadh. They lived in forts, maintained armies, held darbars and exercised powers of a collector and magistrate within their estates.[51]

After annexing Avadh in 1856, Dalhousie adopted an anti taluqdar policy and directed local administration to settle the land to the landholder i.e. village zamindars. However, the programme was upset because of the 1857 Movement in which both taluqdars and landholders fought against the British. After suppression of the movement, the British Government felt convinced that it was expedient to accord a favourable and better treatment to the taluqdars who could help in re-establishment of British authority as well as law and order. Lord Canning, the Governor General, therefore, declared that the taluqdari system was the ancient, indigenous and cherished system of the country. By 1859 when two summary settlements had been completed, nearly two-thirds of the taluqdars received back their land. The British not only followed a policy of maintaining the aristocratic class intact, but by their various steps strengthened their estate and enhanced their status.[52] It is, therefore, no surprise that from 1866 to 1896, the taluqdars improved their position in every sphere.[53] In Lucknow district, during this period, they acquired nearly 14,500 acres of which 7,500 acres was gained by the Muslim taluqdars. Even after 1896, they maintained their progress steadily and in the beginning of 20th century they owned 261 whole villages and portions of 67 other villages with a revenue of 2,84,500 rupees or 28.45% of the total revenue.[54] At that time Lucknow district had 34 taluqdars out of which 14 were Muslims among whom 6 were Shaikhs, 3 Syeds, 2 Pathans, 2 Khanzade and one Mughal.[55]

Besides the taluqdars, there were Zamindars who too held independent proprietary rights. Then there were under proprietors with inferior rights in taluqdari estates. Many of the Zamindars and under proprietors too were Shias.

It may, therefore, be seen that despite having suffered a temporary setback before and immediately after the War of Independence, Shias regained their socio-economic supremacy in Lucknow although in a lesser measure. The main classes through which Shia hegemony was exercised, were the wasiqadars, guaranteed persons, begums, royal descendants and nobles who had amassed huge wealth during the Nawabi days, as well as the taluqdars and zamindars many of whom had either settled down at Lucknow or maintained havelies there and observed and patronised socio-religious celebrations. With the fear of royalty gone, many princes, nobles, begums and taluqdars competed with each other in spending lavishly on art, culture, entertainments and religious celebrations. With their support to taluqdari and zamindari systems and by honouring wasiqa arrangements between the Avadh rulers and begums on one hand and East India Company on the other, the British helped the Shias to remain a dominant community in Lucknow till the end of the nineteenth century. Except for the landed aristocracy and wasiqadars, others had no perennial source of income. As they were traditionalists to the core and considered it below their dignity to cut down their expenses and live within their means, by the turn of the century, most of them were heads and shoulders under debt, their ornaments and jewels having quickly gone into the coffers of the Rastogis, Lucknow's traditional money-lenders. As most of the aristocracy were absentee landlords, they left management of their property in the hands of their mukhtars who as a class, exploited both their masters and the rayot. As such excepting big taluqdars, most of others found themselves heavily indebted and a large portion of their property either sold or mortgaged to Rastogis. The Wasiqadaras too had lost their imortance by this period because with increase in the number of claimants through inheritance and because of their habit to live beyond their means, they too had fallen prey to the Rastogis and other moneylenders. Later it was merely a case of clinging to a post which was glorious and to maintain a facade of superiority but even this world of make believe came to an end with abolition of zamindari in 1952.

GROWTH OF SHIISM

Having examined both rise and fall of Shia power in Lucknow, let us study the growth of Shiism and Shia institutions in Lucknow for their impact on Lucknow's culture has been profound and overwhelming.

Prior to the establishment of Nawabi rule in Avadh, there were very few Shias in Avadh. In spite of the fact that the Nawabs of Avadh were Shias for a time they followed the old practices which had prevailed in India since the start of Muslim rule.[56]

At the centres of learning too, both in Delhi and in the eastern provinces. Hanafi version of education was imparted. In Avadh important educational centres of Islamic studies on the advent of Shia rule, were located at Lucknow, Malihabad and Kakori in Lucknow district, Bilgram and Sandila in Hardoi district, Nasirabad and Jais in Rae Bareli district and Rudauli and Kichhocha in Faizabad district. These institutions offered religious courses in hadis (sayings of the Prophet), tafseer (interpretation of Quran) and fikah (jurisprudence) on Hanafi lines. The Shia boys too having no School of their own, studied in these institutions.[57]

The foremost School of Islamic studies in Lucknow was what is known as Firangi Mahal where in the initial period of Nawabi rule, many Shia boys were educated as the earlier Nawabs were not inclined to encourage Shiism as a public faith.

The Firangi Mahal School was started by Mulla Nizamuddin, son of Mulla Saeed, a resident of Sahali a small town in Barabanki district, who migrated to Lucknow after his father Mulla Qutub Uddin had been murdered by Sheikhzadas of Painitipur. Aurangzeb presented to Mulla Saeed the Firangi Mahal[58] (Literally European Palace) which had been constructed by a French businessman during the Mughal rule and later confiscated to the State and popularly called so because a firangi (European) had built it. After the School was established, the Palace was renamed Farhangi Mahal (the palace of learning and knowledge), but this name never clicked.

Mulla Nizamuddin acquired world wide fame as a scholar and theologian. He prepared a syllabus of theological studies which is still followed by Indian Arabic Schools in a modified form. His son, Mulla Bahrul-Olum too was a man of great learning. He left Lucknow to establish schools of learning in other parts of the country. Among the important Firangi Mahal scholars of the Nawabi days were Maulvi Zaheer Ullah (1760-1840) who occupied the post of Mufti-e-adalat for 40 years in Avadh government, Maulvi Wali Ullah (1768-1853) who too held high offices under the Nawab, Maulvi Abdul Wali (died in 1842) and Maulvi Abdul Razaq (1821-1889).[59]

The Ulems of Firangi Mahal have been beacon of Islamic learning. They also promoted literature, grammar, logic, philosophy, mata-physics etc They adopted a liberal attitude towards non-Sunni sects among the Muslims[60] and gladly taught non-Sunni students too in the Madarsa. As Shias had no educational institutions of their own, they preferred Firangi Mahal for the education of their children. Maulvi Wali Ullah, Maulvi Faiz Ullah and Maulvi Niyamat Ullah took special interest in teaching Shia boys.[61] No wonder many renowned Shia Ulems including Maulvi Dildar Ali, were products of this school.

BEGINNING OF SHIA INFLUENCE

As already stated, the first two Nawabs discreetly maintained status quo in religious matters. However, this could not last long because the Shias who could now openly and publicly practise their religion, expected the Nawabs, their compatriots, to promote Shiism and give it the status of the State or Court religion.

The credit for publicly patronising the Shia sect and Shia Ulema for the first time, goes to Asafuddaulah, the third Nawab and his minister, Sarfaz ud daula Hasan Raza Khan. Till then the muftis in the courts of Avadh, were all Sunnis. Hasan Raza Khan appointed a Shia divine Mirza Mohammad Askari in the court on a pay of Rs. 500 per month as adviser on Shia jurisprudence. However, judiciary remained by and large in the hands of Sunnis.[62] During the rule of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, the four muftis, Niamat Ullah, Ghulam Husain Khan, Saad Ullah Khan and Ghasit Khan as well as Mufti-i-Azam, Mufti Kalal were all Sunnis. Mufti Kalal was followed by Maulvi Madan and Maulvi Zuhur Ullah Ansari who died in 1242 AH or shortly afterwards.

However, it was neither Nawab Asafuddaulah nor his vizier but a Shia Maulvi, Dildar Ali from an obscure town in Rae Bareli district, who was responsible for organizing the Shias of Lucknow into a compact religious group standardizing Shia rituals and observances to conform to recognised Shia doctrines.

Born in Naqvi Syed family of Nasirabad, a small town in 1166 AH, he is said to have studied at Sandila[63], Hardoi and Firangi Mahal, Lucknow from Sunni Teachers. He attracted the attention of Nawab Hasan Raza Khan who gave him a sum of Rs. 5,000 to study higher Shia theology at Najaf Ashraf in Iraq. He returned to India five years later and settled at Lucknow. He engaged himself to reform the Shia community and rid it of unislamic rituals and practices. It was a landmark in the annals of Shiism in India when he led the first Shia namaz in jamat (Congregation) on 12th May 1786 at the residence of Nawab Hasan Raza Khan. Two weeks later, he led the Friday congregational prayers on 26th May 1786 which is stated to be the first ever public congregation not only in Lucknow but in the whole of the Northern India. The Maulana also commenced the practice of giving sermons after prayers, through which he tried to remove evils that had crept in Shia religious practices and among the Shias.[64] It is said that it was after hearing one of the sermons of the Maulana that Asafuddaulah gave up using bhang.[65] He forbade use and inclusion of shahnai, roshan chauki, mahimaratib, pictures and statues of animals in Muharram processions. To make up for these, he permitted use of bands playing martial tunes and additions of menhdi alams, zuljanah and tazias to the processions.[66]

The Maulana was an author of established reputation. He wrote a large number of books covering various aspects of Shia theology. It was on his initiative that Nawab Hasan Raza Khan set up a library of valuable books at a cost of Rs. 1.5 lacs.[67] Under the patronage of the aforementioned Nawab, the Maulana also imparted religious education to Shia boys, thus fulfilling a long felt need of Shia community.

The Maulana was not directly connected with the Avadh darbar. Bahu Begum, the mother of Asafuddaulah had, however, given him a jagir which yielded an income of Rs. 1000 per month. After serving his community for about thirty-five years, he breathed his last on May 2, 1817 in the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider. He was buried in his own Imambara and was given the title of Ghufran Maab by which he is now referred to and the Imambara is still in existance and well known for the traditional majlis-e-Ghariban in the evening of 10th Muharram.

RISE OF POWER OF SHIA ULEMA

Of the five sons of Ghufran Maab, two of them played significant roles in the affairs of Shia community and Avadh government. They were so popular among the Shias and so powerful in the kingdom that they were a power to reckon with even for their mentors, the Kings of Avadh.

Maulana Saiyid Mohammad, the eldest son of Maulvi Dildar Ali was born in 1784 at Lucknow. He had his education from his father and Maulana Haider Ali Sandilvi. At an early age of nineteen, he became a mujtahid and began assisting his father. He succeeded his father as the Chief Shia divine. His relation with Ghaziuddin Haider has been described as 'correct'.[68] However, when Nasiruddin Haider gained the throne of Avadh, the Maulana's relations with royalty became strained. It started with his refusal to perform Nasiruddin's nikah with a woman who had not been formally released by her previous husband.[69] He also refused to give religious sanction to Nasiruddin Haider's drinking on supposed grounds of health quoting the prophet. 'There is no cure in forbidden stuffs'.

Cordiality between royalty and the Maulana was however, restored when Mohammad Ali Shah ascended the throne. An old man with a religious bent of mind, he greatly respected Maulana Saiyid Mohammad. But the Maulana conducted himself with great dignity and refused to cooperate with the King when his actions were not on all fours with Shia Shariat. For instance when Mohammad Ali Shah constructed the Jama Masjid of Husainabad, the Maulana refused to lead the prayers in the mosque because a portion of private land had been encroached upon. On the request of the King to find a way out, he persuaded the owner to accept compensation for his land used in the mosque. After this had been done, he gladly led the congregation.[70]

In this manner, Maulana Saiyid Mohammad built a strong popular base for himself irrespective of the attitude of the rulers. In fact it was not easy for the rulers to do anything against his will or in face of his opposition for fear of adverse popular reaction. However, with the ascension of Amjad Ali Shah on the throne of Avadh, the Maulana had royalty at his feet. Amjad Ali Shah himself a devout and orthodox Shia, made it a principle to consult the Maulana who was titled Sultan-ul-Ulema (King of the Learned) by him, not only in all ecclesiastical matters but also in all governmental activities and political matters. In fact, he assured Sultan-ul-Ulema that he would do his best to run the government according to Shia Shariat. During Amjad Ali Shah's reign, Sultan-ul Ulema grew so powerful and his influence was so pervading that it would be no exaggeration to say that Sultan-ul-Ulema became the de facto ruler of Avadh. Under his influence, Amjad Ali had carried out a number of reforms. He ordered prohibition, banished enunches from Lucknow city[71] and banned prostitution although many prostitutes entered into muta marriages to continue their profession clandestinely.[72]

Sultan-ul-Ulema continued to maintain his hold over Wajid Ali Shah, the successor of Amjad Ali Shah, who did not alter the administrative arrangements and role and participation of the Ulema in affairs of the State inherited from the previous reign, in any appreciable measure.

Sultan-ul-Ulema outlived the rule of the Nawabs. He is stated to have crowned Birjis Qadar when he was proclaimed ruler of Avadh by the freedom fighters in July, 1857. Although Sultan-ul-Ulema lost his political power with the end of the Nawabi rule, his hold and influence over the Shias of Lucknow remained almost intact. The British too considered it expedient to hold him in esteem and to continue the facilities and maafi extended to him by the late government. The Maulana died after a short illness on July 25, 1867. He was called Rizwan Maab after death.

Despite his preoccupations with Avadh darbar, judicial administration and socio-religious activities, Sultan-ul-Ulema wrote 38 books on Shia theology, religious controversies and political affairs.[73] It may also be mentioned that while his father, Ghuffran Maab started the practice of giving sermons after prayers, he was the first mujtahid who started giving discourses in majlises. This led to production of a large number of fluent, accomplished and learned zakirs later for which Lucknow is known far and wide even now.

SAIYID-UL-ULEMA

The story of Sultan-ul-Ulema would not be complete without recounting the life of his long associate and youngest brother, Maulana Syed Husain popularly known as Saiyid-ul-Ulema. He was born in 1796. He had his religious education from his father, Maulvi Dildar Ali and elder brother Sultan-ul-Ulema. Like the latter, he too completed his education at an early age and obtained certificate of Ijtehad when he was only seventeen. He was intelligent and completely devoted to studies with the result that he emerged as one of the most learned Shia theologians of his time. His most well known work is Hadiqa-i-Sultania, a treatise in Persian dealing with basic principles of Shiism. He worked shoulder to shoulder with his elder brother as a leader of Shia community but unlike his brother, he kept himself aloof from secular matters. Madarsa-i-Sultania, the first Shia School of Theology owes its existence to his efforts.[74] He died in 1857 at a comparatively younger age of 61.

The two brothers had between them thirteen sons out of which eight made marks as important Mujtahids of their times. Syed Mohammad Baqar who was titled Munsif-ud-daulah was appointed Superintendent of Judiciary during the reign of Amjad Ali Shah. His brother, Syed Mohammad Murtaza who was given the title of Khulastul Ulema, was put in charge of sadarul saduri i.e. Department of Criminal Administration. Syed Ali Naqi a nephew of Sultan-ul-Ulema who got the title of Zubdatul Ulema, was made responsible for disbursement of charity (zakat) after Sultan-ul-Ulema found his hands too full to perform this job.

Besides Khandan-i-Ijtihad or (the family of high priests) that is how the family of Maulvi Dildar Ali was and is still known—the families of Mufti Mohammad Abbas Shustri and Mufti Mohammad Quli also attained fame and recognition as leading Shia theologians.

Among the prominent Shia divines not connected with the above families who successfully portrayed Shia doctrines and projected Shia points of view, can be cited Maulana Ahmad Ali Mohammad-abadi who was head of the Madarsai Sultania during the reign of Amjad Ali Shah. Maulana Syed Mohammad Hadi, Maulana Syed Mir Mohammad Ali, Sheikh Ali Akhtar, Mirza Mohammad Ali and Maulvi Musharraf Ali.[75]

The Ulemas besides leading prayers, speaking in mosques and imambaras and issuing fatwas on important religious issues, had also their say in social and ritualistic matters. Whenever a new King ascended the throne, the crown was placed on him usually by the Mujtahidul Asr or another important Shia divine. Their services were also utilised for performing nikah in the royal family. They also led the funeral prayers of Kings and nobles. They were also entitled to the aaqbati jora (heavenly dress) meant for a dead prince or nawab, which was usually prepared at a high cost. On Chehlum (fortieth day ceremony) of a royal deceased person, the mujtahid was also presented with an elephant, which was usually purchased by nobles at a throw away price. The King also used to present Khilat (robe of honour) and an elephant to the Chief High Priest on happy occasions like Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Qurban.[76]

The Shia Ulema moved about with dignity and in style. According to Agha Mehdi, the epithet 'Sarkar' could be used only by mujtahids. They usually rode in finus or palkee, sitting in the middle prominently, reclining against a takia. A Khasdan, small box and a Muradabadi lota also found place in the carriage. Along the carriage, moved a servant with a stick of bitter almond which was substituted with a sword on the occasion of Id and a phanoos. The palkee was lifted by four men at a time who were replaced at intervals. Thus 6 to 32 kahars depending on the distance to be covered, were harnessed. They were led by a head kahar called mehra who wore a distinctive uniform and emblem which enabled him to enter the royal precincts.[77]

The Mujtahids were held in high esteem by every one royalty, nobility, gentry and commoners. They were usually addressed by high sounding titles prefixed by phrases of reverence like qible-e-kaaba and sarkar. It was considered an honour to touch their feet. As we have already seen, like Avadh rulers, they too were given titles after their death by which they were later referred to. They were also widely known, at least to Lucknowites, by their pet names and were referred to as such in informal conversations. For instance, Maulana Syed Husain was usually mentioned as Miran Saheb.

Munazira

Munazira or public debate of Shia-Sunni controversy in Lucknow must be attributed to rise of Shia power in Lucknow where Shias had won their freedom in religious matters and were keen to assert their point of view and contest the different view held by Sunnis. According to Sharar, Munazira between Sunnis and Shias started with the arrival of Qazi Nur Ullah Shustri from Iran who contested some Sunni interpretations of Islam.[78] Later Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddis of Delhi published a work to contradict the Shia viewpoint. Maulvi Dildar Ali took up cudgels with him and wrote three books namely, Swarumul Al Hayaat, Hassmul Islam and Risal-i-Ghibat in refutation of the contention of Shah Abdul Aziz.[79] Maulana Haider Ali, a resident of Faizabad who had settled at Lucknow, then entered the fray and worte Muntahi-ul-Kalam in support of Shia interpretation. Maulvi Lutf Ullah who had settled at Lucknow, wrote several books in support of Sunni doctrine.[80] Mulla Moin of Firangi Mahal who was a contemporary of Ahmad Ali Shah wrote Risal-i-Moinia, attacking the practice of muta. In later years, this was taken up with great zeal by Maulvi Abdul Shakoor. On the Shia side, Maulvi Hamid Husain, son of Mufti Mohammad Quli, wrote a number of volumes to refute Sunni doctrine.[81]

Munazira had a poetic side too. Mian Mushir, a Shia poet of Lucknow composed a number of satirical poems to repudiate Maulvi Lutft Ullah. His most well known work on Munazira, Kantap was published by Matbai Asna Asri. Both the author and the press were prosecuted. Mir Mushir had to leave Lucknow and migrate to Calcutta where he died later. Mirza Shikoh, a Mughal Prince who had become a Shia and was settled at Lucknow, wrote a book under the title of Ilm-i-Haideri dar Aqaid Salatin-i-Taimuri, in 1270 A.H. (1853 AD) claiming that all Mughal rulers beginning from Taimur were Shia by conviction. Mirza Ghalib, the renowned poet and himself a Shia, wrote a masnavi in confutation of Mirza Shikoh's claim. In reply, the prince himself and Mir Dost Ali Khalil of Lucknow who was a follower of Khwaja Atish, a famous poet of Lucknow, wrote masnavis. Khalil allegedly wrote his masnavi with the help of Mufti Mir Abbas Shustri. This prompted Maulvi Imam Bux Sahbai to write a masnavi in rebuttal. He also cast aspersions on the Mufti. Mufti Mir Abbas Shustri did not allow Sahbai's masnavi to remain unanswered and came out with his masnavi, Khitab-i-Fazil in 1860. In this way five masnavis on Shia-Sunni religious duel came into existence.[82]

To conclude, the territory of Avadh under the rule of Nawabs, provided a shelter to Shias where they could profess their religion openly and freely and gave an ample opportunity to Shia boys to undertake Islamic studies according to Shia tenets. Beginning with Ghufran Maab, a galaxy of Shia mujtahids and maulanas were produced by Lucknow. They helped to grow Shiism not only in Lucknow but in the whole of India. Their training in Shia theology, was combined with a thorough study of Persian and Urdu literatures. To quote Sharar, Shia religious leaders had made literature, poetry and Arabic prosody their own particular subjects.[83] They attained fame as distinguished orators especially as narrators of Karbala tragedy. They not only marshalled the facts well but spoke in beautiful and flowery Urdu punctuated with Arabic and Persian phrases and sentences. They were invited and well received in India and abroad not merely as Shia theologians but also as ambassadors of Lucknow's culture which had caught the imagination of the people all over India, irrespective of their caste or creed,

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3

HUSAIN, HUSAIN

Lucknow exists but to mourn Husain.
Rightly it can be called the Home of Husain.
. . . (*Dilgir*)

Out of the sombre shadow,
Over the gleaming grass
Slow, in a sad procession,
The shadowy pageants pass,
Mourmful, majestic and solemn,
Stricken, pale and dumb,
Crowned in their matchless sorrow,
The sacred martyrs come—
Hark ! thro' the brooding silence
Breaks the wild cry of pain
Wrung from the heart of the ages,
Ali ! Hassan ! Husain !

(*Sarojini Naidu, The Lucknow Imambara*)

We have traced in chapter 2, how Avadh under Shia rule provided a sanctuary for Shias who were not free to practise their religion publicly under the Mughal rulers. The first two Nawab-Viziers, however, did not encourage public display of Shiism in their times out of deference to the Mughal Emperor. With the further weakening of Mughal power and later assumption of title of king by Ghaziuddin Haider under British instigation, Shiism was not only able to get rid of the shackles placed on it under Muslim rule but began to grow rapidly and make its presence felt in Avadh. No wonder, within a short time Avadh and Lucknow had become the largest centre of Shia theology as well as religious observances and celebrations, thanks to the active patronage extended by the rulers and Shia nobility.

TRAGEDY OF KARBALA

Muharram and connected celebrations are by far the most important religious preoccupation of the Shias spreading over more than two months in a year over-shadowing all other activities. It is the tragedy of Karbala which forms the pivot of these observances and which has provided the source and basis for the manifestation of the unique and mass expression of grief by the Shias who can be appropriately called a community in perpetual mourning. It is therefore, necessary to describe the events leading to the tragedy of Karbala briefly before we take up celebrations connected with this mournful festival during the Nawabi period and after.

Although the Shias hold Hazrat Ali as the rightful successor to the Prophet, actually he was the fourth Caliph. His immediate predecessor, Hazrat Usman, belonged to the clan of Umayya who had no love lost for the clan of Hashim to which belonged Hazrat Mohammad and Hazrat Ali, despite the fact that both the clans were part of the same tribe i.e. the Querraish. No doubt the Ummayads consolidated their position during Hazrat Usman's regime. Muaviya, a member of this clan who was governor of Syria, raised the banner of revolt against Hazrat Ali and after the battle of Siffin (657 A.D.), Hazrat Ali and Muaviya entered into an agreement to get their dispute settled by arbitration. But soon after, Hazrat Ali was killed while praying in Kufa in Iraq. Imam Hasan, Hazrat Ali's eldest son who succeeded him, however, abdicated in favour of Muaviya on the condition that after Muaviya, the Caliphate was to be reverted to the family of the Prophet. Imam Hasan was later poisoned to death and in violation of the agreement with Imam Hasan, Muaviya nominated his son Yezid, a debauch and a pleasure loving and unworthy young man, to succeed him. In accordance with an age-old Arab custom, Muaviya asked important Muslims to perform 'baiyat' (literally kissing the hand) to express their allegiance to his son. Imam Husain, the younger brother of Imam Hasan, however, flatly refused to oblige Muaviya who then thought it wise to let the matter rest there. On Muaviya's death, Yezid pressed Imam Husain again to express his allegiance to him. When harassed at Medina, Husain left for Mecca. Men of Yezid, however, entered Mecca disguised as pilgrims with a view to murdering him. To avoid bloodshed in the holy city and in response to the pressing invitation from the people of Kufa, he moved out of Mecca too, along with his family members, friends and loyal followers. As the people of Kufa had proved treacherous to his father and elder brother, Imam Husain deputed his cousin, Hazrat Muslim to visit Kufa to judge the situation there. On reaching there, Muslim and his two sons were killed in cold blood on the orders of the governor Abeedullah, son of Ziyad on 9th Zilhij, 60 AH. The governor also despatched a contingent under Hurr to intercede the march of Husain towards Kufa. This contingent met Husain and his camp at Hasm. At that time Hurr and his troops were dying of thirst. Husain gave them water to drink. The two parties moved on next day. When they had reached Qadsia (Karbala) the messengers of the Governor of Syria brought orders for Hurr to stop Husain from progressing any further. A large army of Syrian soldiers under Umar Saad had also by that time reached there and surrounded Husain and his contingent from all sides and pressed Imam Husain to express his allegiance to Yezid. Imam Husain again refused but suggested three alternatives to Umar Saad—he may be allowed to return to Mecca or Medina or he may go to a far off place in one of the countries, under Islamic control or he may be given an opportunity to have a dialogue with Yezid. The Governor of Kufa, however, refused to accept any of these requests and instead sent a large army under Shimr to assist Umar Saad to ensure that either Husain accepted the Caliphate of Yezid or in case of refusal, he was beheaded. This ultimatum was delivered to Husain on 9th Muharram. He collected his people after evening prayers, narrated the events and said that they were free to leave him. While some made good their escape under the cover of darkness, others affirmed to remain with him, knowing very well that they were destined to die.

Next day i.e. on 10th of Muharram, the final battle of Karbala took place. With Husain were thirty-two horse men and forty foot men. Many were too old or too young to fight. Then all of them had taken no drop of water for the last three days, as from the seventh of Muharram, the enemy had prevented Husain's men from drawing water from the river Furat (Euphrates) which was the only source of water at Karbala. Arrayed against them was a force whose strength was estimated to be between 20,000 to 50,000. In accordance with the Arab custom, the men of Husain's camp went to the battle field one by one and lost their lives after a brave fight. Among them were Qasim, son of Imam Hasan, Akbar, Husain's youthful son of eighteen and Aun and Mohammad, minor sons of his sister, Zainab. Even his breast-fed son, Ali Asghar was shot dead by a poisoned arrow by Hurmila. Husain himself was killed and beheaded by Shimr after he had fought the enemy valiantly. The only male who survived was Husain's son, Zainul Abedin who was too sick to give a fight to the enemy. The enemy then looted Husain's camp and set fire to the tents. They collected the heads of the martyrs and got their bodies trampled over by horses. Having buried their dead and leaving the bodies of martyrs on the plains of Karbala unburied, the enemy led the women and children of Husain's camp to the head of a procession which carried heads of martyrs on lances. The women and children seated on bare camel backs, were harassed, tortured and ridiculed all the way. They were ultimately produced before Yezid and then imprisoned in a dark cell from where they were set free only after a year had passed. Husain's youngest daughter, Sakina, died in prison. The bodies of Husain and his companions were later buried by male members of Asad tribe who lived near Karbala.[1]

Atrocities at Karbala were perpetuated on a grandson of the Prophet barely within sixty years from his death by a section of the Muslims themselves. The poignancy of events, barbarity of Yezid and his men in dealing with Husain and his followers in his life-time and with his family members after his death and above all the steadfastness of Husain in upholding the cause of Islam, Truth and Righteousness, are the main features of the Karbala tragedy. No wonder, mourning for Husain and other Karbala martyrs, has assumed a great religious significance for the Muslims in general and Shias in particular.

It was, therefore, natural for the Shia rulers of Avadh to take personal interest in and to pay great attention to public celebrations connected with Muharram. Under the Safavi rulers of Iran, Muharram celebrations had received state patronage. No wonder, the

Avadh rulers, being of Iranian descent, not only extended state support to such celebrations but also adopted the Iranian style of observing Muharram to a great extent. Later, however, they introduced many innovations, changes and improvements which considerably indianized the celebrations, so much so that most of the population of Lucknow, irrespective of their caste and creed, took part in these celebrations which became an integral part of Lucknow's cultural life.

We have already described the various Trusts created by Avadh rulers with a view to ensuring perpetual celebrations of Muharram as observed by them during their life-time. The rulers and many nobles following their example, also constructed edifics for public functions in connection with Muharram observances. These can be categorised as Imambaras, Karbalas and Dargahs. Even now these institutions constitute the main centres of public mourning in Muharram. It would be worthwhile to know a few details about these places and their role.

Imambaras

As the name signifies, Imambara means 'place of Imam'. It consists of one or more large halls with spacious open ground. The building is mainly meant for holding majlises and observing Muharram rituals although during idle periods, it can be used for non-religious and social purposes too. The Imambaras were originally set up in Iraq and Iran when they were called Husainia or Majlis. In South India they were known as Ashur Khana while in some other parts of the country, the term Astana was used.

The Great Imambara or the Imambara of Asaf-ud-Daulah was constructed in 1783-87 on the right bank of river Gomti. This majestic building whose main hall is considered the largest vaulted hall in the world, was designed by Kifaat-ul-lah, a famous architect of that period. Above the hall is the Bhul-Bhulaiyan i.e. the place where you get lost. The labyrinth consists of a large number of stairs and paths from which visitor cannot easily come out. In the same compound is a large and beautiful mosque. Because of their dimensions and picturesque splendour, these buildings are counted among the most imposing in the world.[2]

Asaf-ud-daula got the Imambara profusely decorated. Fourteen zarihs of the Fourteen Sinless were installed in the Imambara. He also ordered manufacture of two Tazias to be made from green and red glass respectively through Dr. Blance, one of which reached Lucknow in his life-time in 1211 A.H. (1796-97).[3] Egerton who visited Lucknow, in 1851, however, found the building in an unswept condition and the hall looked poor although in the moonlight, the sight was magnificent.[4]

The Imambara of Husainabad was built by Mohammad Ali Shah in 1253 A.H. (1837). It is located on the right side of the river Gomti at a distance of less than a kilometre from the Great Imambara. It consists of a quadrangle, well laid gardens, canal-like tanks and fountains. The principal building lies in front of the entrance and contains the tomb of Mohammad Ali Shah and his mother. It consists of a big hall with two rooms on either side of the hall. The vaulted roof of the building looks flat from outside. It is capped by a gilded dome in the centre and a cupola on either side. The building has a large number of Quranic verses and inscriptions in praise of Hazrat Ali. On the east and west of the courtyard are situated two small buildings. The right hand building contains the grave of a daughter of the King who died unmarried. The building on the opposite side is only to match the tomb.[5] The complex was built at a cost of about 20 lacs of rupees and a sum of 36 lacs of rupees were deposited with the Company for its maintenance and celebrations. It was profusely decorated with costly mirrors, chandeliers and religious objects. These decorations have been described in full detail by Europian travellers who have, however, not always found much to admire. Leopold Von Orlich who saw the Imambara in 1843, remarked that it looked more like a showroom of a glass warehouse than the sepalchre of a King.[6] Egerton who saw the Imambara during the Muharram of 1851, speaks of the decorations as follows :

> "Every description of chandelier of every colour and shape was there, some hanging from the ceiling, some on upright stands . . . besides glass works of every description . . . . Many of the chandeliers are really handsome but what I most covetted were two little filagnee gold lamps hanging up in two recesses. The effect when we went at night to see the whole place, garden and all, illuminated was really beautiful".[7]

Then he describes the illumination in detail. Lamps were placed and lighted at every place on the building. When there was no place to put lamps, a bamboo framework on which the lights were placed, was erected. The lights came from earthen pots or fragments of coconut shells containing oil in which wicks floated. He finally remarks "Altogether, I dont't know that I ever saw anything gayer or prettier."[8]

Shah Najaf is yet another Imambara of the Nawabi days located near Hazratganj. It was built by Ghaziuddin Haider in 1818-1823 in which he was later buried. It is modelled on the mausoleum of Hazrat Ali at Najaf. The Imambara is reputed for its expensive white dome, well laid out garden and interior decoration. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali gives an interesting account of decorations of Shah Najaf on seventh of Muharram i.e. on the Night of Mebndi, in the period of Ghazi-ud-Uddin Haider. She says "The walls were well covered with handsome glass and mirrors, the splendid chandeliers one containing a hundred waxlights in every variety. . . giving it a fairy like effect to the brilliant scene. In the Centre of the building stood the green glass Tazia surrounded by waxlights on the right of which was placed an immense lion and on the left a fish both formed from the same bright emerald green glass as the Tazia. . . . In the niches and recesses of the Imambara were placed models of Mecca, the tent of Husain, the gate of Karbala, etc. These were made of pure silver and rest on tables of the same metal. Many curious sabres of all ages, shield chain armours of the ancient lances and arranged with much taste, adorn the interior."[9]

Some of the other important Imambaras built during the Nawabi days and still in existence are those built by Maulana Dildar Ali (called Imambara Ghufran Maab), by Nawab Tahseen Ali Khan, a Khatri Hindu convert during the period of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and by Mir Baqar, an Iranian merchant during the reign of Nasiruddin Haider, It is interesting to find that during the Nawabi rule many non-Muslims too, built Imambaras and observed Muharram. Jhaulal, for instance, built an Imambara in mohalla Nawabganj. Among the Hindu officials connected with the court, who constructed Imambaras were Raja Tikait Rai, Raja Mehra and Raja Mewa Ram.

Ritual Objects in the Imambara

The main object of veneration in an Imambara is the tazia or zarih, a representation of the tomb of Imam Husain and other martyrs of Karbala or even the Prophet.[10] The zarih and tazia slightly differ in shape. While the zarih has a round dome, a tazia possesses an elongated one or none at all. Besides, unlike the tazia, the zarih has no in-built arrangement for alams. According to Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, the tazias were made of all possible materials from paper to ivory, ebony, sandal-wood, cedar and pure gold. She found the King's tazia handsomest. It was made of green glass with brass mouldings made in England. The commoners' tazias made of bamboo frames over which was fixed coloured abrak (lapis specularum), were available in the market in different sizes costing between Rs. 2 to Rs. 200 each.[11]

Munshi Lutf Ali prepared the first wax zarih during the reign of Mohammad Ali Shah. His son Mukhtar Ahmad made the famous wax zarih of Imambara of Husainabad.[12]

In course of time, tazia making developed into a fine and highly developed art mostly in Sunni hands. Many artisans and artists spent the whole year preparing the tazia. From Agha Mahdi and Mirza Jaffar Hussain, we get an idea of the designs and types of tazias made in the post-Nawabi period. Many artisan groups prepared tazias from the materials used in their craft or profession. For instance, the tazias taken out by halwais (confectioners), bharbhujas (grain parchers), kumhars (potters), nadaafs (cotton dressers), and darzis (tailors) were made from sugar and batashes, barley and pea, mud, cotton and cut pieces respectively. Similarly tazias prepared from chikan, bangles and wood were installed by chikan workers, manihars (bangle sellers), and najjars (carpenters) respectively. The tazias were of different hues such as red, white, green and black.[13]

At the base of the tazia, were placed several articles likely to have been used by Imam Husain at Karbala. For example, a turban of gold or silver tissue, a splendid sword and belt, the handle and hilt set with precious stones, a shield, the Arabian bow and arrows.[14]

In post Nawabi period along with the tazia of potters in Mohalla Chaupatian, the model of an old man, which looked very real, was also invariably prepared by the potters. The originator of the model was Tikaram, a potter of the area.[15] The Chhalbdars, a community of professional singers and dancers, also took out a tazia and they themselves used to recite marsiyas in sorrowful tunes. Agha Abdul Karim Khan, a soldier from Kabul employed in the English army, used to keep a tazia which was taken out in a procession on ashura immediately after the zarih of Mohammed Ah Shah was taken out. He started the matam with golden chain for the first time in Lucknow.

The tazia-dars belonged to all communities. Among the Hindu taziadars, there was a practice which was not followed by others. Some of them would put on a turban on the head and a tapka in the waist and hold a murchhal tied with small bells in the hand. They were called Paiks or Nayaks. A paik would come out on 10th of Muharram and would be continuously on the move. He would not participate in breast beating or reciting of nauhas but would occasionally utter in Persian, "Husain got killed".[16] According to a popular belief the paik was the messenger who conveyed the news of Husain's martyrdom to the tomb of the Prophet, Hazrat Ali etc.[17]

The tazias were installed between fourth and sixth Muharram and were taken out in procession on Ashura and Chehlum. Menhdi processions were organized on 7th Muharram and the haziri ceremony was held beneath the alams of Hazrat Abbas on 8th Muharram. To observe, this ceremony, foodstuffs like sheermal, parathas, kababs and halua which were partaken of only by devout Shias, were cooked. The night between 9th and 10th of Muharram was full of activity. People kept awake and visited Imambaras which were profusely illuminated. There would be chanting of dirges by women in groups, both Hindus and Muslims. The tazias would be taken out on 10th Muharram soon after sun rise and they made their way to Talkatora amidst nauhakhwani and sozkhwani and beating of dhols and tasha. The courtesans too accompanied their tazias chanting nauhas. Some of the prominent taziadar courtesans were Haider Jan, Badre Munir, Mehre Munir, Babban, Mughal Jan and Najja.[18]

In many Imambaras was also kept a representation of Buraq, the Winged Horse on which the Prophet made an excursion into the Heaven.[19] Fanny Parkes also saw a neza, a spear or lance, dressed up with a turban the ends flying in the air and a lime fixed at the tope of it emblematic of Husain's head,[20] in the Imambara of Hakim Mahdi. In the same Imambara, she was also shown the 'nal sahib' a horse-shoe which was affixed to the end of a long pole made from silver and gold metals, wood and paper, which was intended to be an emblem of Husain's horse (Duldul).[21]

Alam or the banner is yet another sacred object connnected with the Imambara and Muharram observances. The alam has a top made of a metal and a patka made of embroidered cloth and tasselled with gold, silver or cheap substitutes. The patka is tied to the alam and the two are hoisted on a pole which, too, is decorated. The alams usually represent standards of Hazrat Ali, his sons Hasan, Husain and Abbas as well as other martyrs of Karbala.

Let us hear from Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali about the alams in the period of Ghaziuddin Haider.

"On each side of the tazias—the whole length of the wall-banners are ranged, in great variety of colour and fabric. I have seen many constructed of the richest embroidery on silk grounds of gold or silver with massy gold fringes, cords and tassels. The staff is cased with gold or silver worked into figures of birds and other animals in every variety the top of which has a crest in some, a spread hand in others, a sort of plume and not unfrequently a crest formed of the precious metals and set with stones of great value."[22]

As for the poor, they used cheaper materials to prepare their alams. The patka was made of material ranging between tinsel imitation to dyed muslin according to the means of the mourner. Similar difference could be perceived in the selection of the metals of which the crest was made.[23]

In the Imambara of Hakim Mahdi were kept a number of standards representing those of Ali, Fatima, Husain and other martyrs of Karbala as well as other Imams. The banners of Ali, were denominated 'The Palm of the Hand of Ali, 'The Elect', 'The Hand of Lion of God', 'Palm of Displayer of Wonders' and the 'Palm of Dispenser of Difficulties'. The alam of Qasim, the Bridegroom was distinguishable by its little chatra (umbrella) in gold and silver.[24]

The Tabuts (literally Coffins) of martyrs of Karbala were also kept in the Imambara during Muharram. Tabuts of Hazrat Ali and other Imams were also kept on the dates of their death. The Tabuts are usually rectangular wooden frames covered with a cloth of black or any other appropriate colour. The Tabuts of Imam Husain, Imam Hasan, Ali Akbar, Ali Asghar, Sakina and Qasim deserve special mention. Imam Hasan's Coffin is coloured green to signify his death by poisoning. Imam Husain's Tabut is sprinkled with red colour and pierced with swords, knives and arrows to point out his manner of martyrdom.[25]

The Mimber is not exactly a sacred object. It is a pulpit consisting of stairs usually three, five or seven steps used by the speaker while speaking or reciting marsiyas in a majlis. Here is a description of the mimber in the imambaras of the nobility in the period of Ghaziuddin Haider.

'The member (mimber) is constructed of silver, ivory ebony etc. i.e. to correspond with the tazia if possible; the steps are covered sometimes with gold cloth or brocaded cloth of black or green. The shape of a member is a flight of steps with a flat top without any railing or enclosed place; the reader, accordingly sitting on the step or standing as may be most convenient to himself.'[26]

Karbalas

The Karbalas taking their name from the place where Husain became a martyr, are the burial ground of tazias although they are also used for other rituals connected with Muharram as well as for burial of Shia dead bodies.

The Karbala of Talkatora is the largest in Lucknow. In its premises are located Dargah Hazrat Hasan, a mosque and a Qatlgah (place of assassination). The present Karbala was built by Meer Khuda Bux in 1232 A.H (1800 AD)[27] in the reign of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan. Despite her stay for twelve years in Lucknow, Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali never went to the Karbala to witness burial of Tazias because of anticipated feuds between Shias and Sunnis. According to her, Shias and Sunnis fought many a battle on the grounds of Karbala to settle their religious and even personal disputes.[28]

Karbala Malka-e-Afaq was built by Amjad Ali Shah to commemorate the memory of his mother Malka-e-Afaq, queen of Mohammad Ali Shah. Another Karbala exists in the name of Mohammad Ali Shah's second wife, Malka Jahan. Karbala Azimullah, as the name suggests, was constructed by Azimullah who was originally Mohammad Ali Shah's barber and was titled Aazam-u-daullah and appointed as Darogha of Dewan Khana.[29]

Then there are the Karbala of Diyanat-ud-daullah said to have been built by Agha Mirza, an Iranian companion of Diyanat-ud-daullah, a Hindu minister,[30] Karbala Kazmain, Karbala Azmat-ud-daullah, Karbala of Mahanagar and many others. Mahanagar Karbala is now used for burial of Sunni tazias only. Nasiruddin Haider, too, built a karbala but it is in ruins now.

Dargahs

Dargahs or shrines are usually built in the name of Muslim saints and as such are not linked with Muharram but the shrines dedicated to Imam Husain and other martyrs of Karbala, play an important role in Muharram celebrations. Many Karbalas have dargahs in the name of Imam Hussain or Imam Hasan.

The shrine of Kazmain is said to have been built by Sharf-ud-daullah originally, a Hindu Bania named Jagannath referred to in Chapter-2, in 1269 A.H. It is stated to be an exact replica of the tombs of Imams, Musa Kazim and Mohammad Taqui at Khorasan in Iran.

Dargah Hazrat Abbas is by far the most well known and reputed shrine of Lucknow. According to Agha Mahdi, it is widely believed that the alam (metal crest) of Hazrat Abbas, the gallant cousin and standard bearer of Hussain, was brought to Lucknow and was buried at the spot where the dargah is now located. There lived a syed in poverty. He dreamt that the alam was buried there. When the ground was dug, the alam was found. It was first installed by one Mirza Faqir Beg in his home in mohalla Rustamnagar. It was later taken to its original site. The present building was mainly built by Nawab Saadat Ali Khan who constructed its golden dome.[31]

Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali gives a slightly different version. An Indian while on a pilgrimage to Mecca, dreamt that Hazrat Abbas appeared before him and asked him to proceed to Karbala and dig out the alam used by him on the great day at Karbala from a location mentioned by him. The man acted accordingly and brought the alam secretly to India and Lucknow. It was during the period of Asafuddaulah who giving full credence to this narrative, constructed a small building in which the crest was safely deposited with full honours.[32]

Since the days of this Nawab, all the rulers of Avadh would come to the Dargah to pay homage immediately after occupying office. When Wajid Ali Shah went to Matiaburj he made an offiering of his crown and sword in the dargah. In 1857, the dargah was occupied by Avadh rebels and in the melee, the alam disappeared. It is believed by Shias that the exit of the alam was a divine act.[33]

The alams taken out during Muharram and connected celebrations as well as on first Thursday of each month, were brought to the Dargah. They touched the sacred crest and were then taken out through the opposite door. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali estimated that on fifth day of Muharram, forty to fifty thousand alams were taken to the dargah for consecrating the sacred crest.[34] Malka Zamania, one of the wives of the Nasiruddin Haider, used to visit the Dargah on the first Thursday of each lunar month with great pomp and show and spent about ten thousand rupees on offerings, charity and pageantry in the hope of being blessed with a son.[35]

The Majlis

The majlis or mourning assembly was an important feature and the most serious business of Muharram rituals. The majlises were usually held in the Imambaras or large halls befittingly decorated for the occasion.

According to Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, majlises were held twice a day during the Muharram. One of the Shia maulanas was engaged to recite from a Persian book, Dihi Majlis (Ten Majlises). This book was in ten parts containing a subject for each day from the first to tenth of Muharram, dealing with life and services of the Imam. When the maulana had finished his recitation, a substitute for pan i.e. a mixture of dried coffee (perhaps katha, A.H.), coconut shreds, betel nuts, cardamum, dhania (Coriandrum sativum), tobacco and lime were passed around among the participants. Then hookahs were placed, before the superiors. The younger people and the inferiors did not puff at hookahs in the presence of the superiors. These over, the second session of the majlis began. In this session, marsiyas were chanted by people with well practised voices. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali felt that marsiya recitation was much more impressive and popular because the marsiyas were in Urdu. After the marsiya recitation, the whole assembly rose and entreated blessings and peace for the souls of the 'lawful leader' and then cursed the 'usurpers'. Then followed the matam or beating of breasts amidst the cries of Hasan and Husain.[36]

In many homes, there were zenana Imambaras where the ladies held majlises. Where there were no Imambaras the best apartment in the establishment, was used for holding majlises. Men were not admitted to these majlises.[37]

The pattern of proceeding and the type of recitations and oratory in majlises have changed from time to time since the beginning of the Nawabi rule.

In the earliest majlises, there used to be rauzakhwani i.e. recitation from Mulla Hasan Waiz Kashifi's work Rauzatussafa. The mulla was an Iranian scholar who flourished in seventh Hijra. Recitation from his book became so popular in Iran that Majlis was called rauzakhwani in Iran. In the beginning rauzakhwani was adopted in Lucknow too.

Kitabkhawni i.e. recitation from a book was a variation of rauzakhwani. According to Agha Mahdi, the speaker (who was called kitabkhwan), would recite from a Persian book dealing with the Karbala tragedy from the pulpit. He would conclude his reading by reciting the following Persian couplet.[38]

Injured were the red lips of Imam of Medina.
Red stones of Yemen, his teeth became with blood.
My friend, say the truth in favour of the King of the People.
Did Zainab really deserve the lashes ?

Kitabkhwani was preceded by marsiyakhwani and followed by matam and ziarat (viewing the sacred objects).

Then came the waqiakhawan, narrators of incidents, who would stand on the Mimber and recount the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his followers at Karbala in a moving and effective language punctuated with apt verses usually using Persian as vehicle of expression. The waquiakhwan concluded his discourse with the following Persian couplet :

Not easy to describe is the story of Prophet's family.

This is a story, details of which are limitless, indeed.

He would then begin breast beating slowly and the audience would emulate him, amidst chanting of nauhas. The waqiakhwan would then come down from the mimber. It would be a signal for the marsiyakhwans to recite marsiyas usually those composed by Dilgir, Zamir, Anis or Dabir.[39] The recitation was termed tahtul lafz-khwani because the raginis were not pronounced and remained in the background.

According to Mirza Jaffar Husain, to play fiddle to the Waqiakhwan and to assist him, two of his comrades would sit on either side of the pulpit on the floor. Whenever the waquiakhwan paused, they would recite nauhas in Urdu. This institution lingered on in the Shahi Imambaras especially in Husainabad till the first decade of the twentieth century when it was completely given up.[40]

Hadiskhwans or narrators of hadis made their debut during the last days of Nawabi rule in Avadh. This was also the beginning of narrations in Urdu. According to Mirza Jaffar Hussain, the narrator would sit on the pulpit with a book and read Arabic passages from it. He would translate and explain them in Urdu. He would then proceed to describe the virtues of the Ahle-Bait and finish by recounting the tribulation at Karbala in a moving and pathetic language.[41] The zakir (or Zakir-e-Husain, as the narrator was called) would conduct himself with the help of written notes.[42] During the Nawabi days, it was the usual practice to pray for the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam and also for health, life and prosperity of the King, Prince, the vizier, the ulema and the audience, in that order. In some of the marsiyas of that period we find praise and prayer for the King.[43]

In the beginning, the mujtahids did not give discourse in these majlises. It was Sultanul Ulema who took the lead in this direction and it is because of him and his descendants and disciples that Lucknow's zakirs and oratory have won India wide recognition. It needs to be emphasized that much of the present day oratory of Lucknow has, developed in post Nawabi period although the roots were formed earlier.

These majlises were also known for their sozkhawani i.e. recitation of elegies in melodies. We have already referred to nauhas (dirges) chanted at the end of the Majlis. The soz too was chanted like a song in rhythm. According to Sharar, sozkhawani and nauhakhwani both were widely known and current among Shias in other parts of India before sozkhawani was perfected as an art by the Lucknowites.[44]

As Shia ulema did not encourage music, sozkhwani was avoided in their presence.

He have it from Sharar that many innovations were introduced in the post Nawabi period to give majlises semblance of a dramatical performance. For instance, one Maulive Mahdi Hasan used curtains with scenes of Karbala painted on them in his majlises. In the majlises held in his zenana apartments, Karbala scenes were acted by women.[45] These innovations were, however, short-lived.

It may not be out of place to mention here some of the important zakirs, marsiyagos, nauhakhwans and sozkhwans of the Nawabi days. We are not mentioning marsiya writers as they have been dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

An Iranian, Agha Mohammad Nadim, who was a rauzakhwan and marsiyago, used to recite in the majlises held by Nawab Asaf ud Daulah. Mulla Mohammad was yet another rauzakhwan of Asafi period. He used to recite in the Bara Imambara.[46] Other rauzakhwans mentioned by Agha Mahdi were Maulvi Syed Ahmad Gauhar and Mirza Arab Babbu who were Kashmiris.[47] Among the hadiskhwans, the names of Abu Talib, Shah Husain, Meer Mohammad Shah and Mohammad Ali deserve special mention. Mohammad Ali, son of Mohammad Husain, was a reputed rauzakhwan. His book, Akhbar Matam was published in 1285 A.H. Among well known marsiyagos of this period were Nawab Hasim Ali Khan and Mirza Panah Ali during the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider, Ghulam Murtaza, in the period of Nasiruddin Haider, Mir Ahmad Ali, Mir Zaki and Mir Gauhar Ali during the rule of Amjad Ali Shah as well as Syed Mohammad Mirza Uns, Mirza Sabir and Mahdi Hasan who flourished in the period of Wajid Ali Shah.[48]

Earliest sozkhwans came to Avadh during the period of Shujaudaulah. Khwaja Hasan Maududi, an expert musician who was incidently a Sunni, harmonized some special dhuns to sozkhwani.[49] Another important contributor to this art who lived in the period of Saadat Ali Khan was, Crazy Haideri Khan. He trained Mir Ali, a member of noble Syed family who promoted this art considerably. He was a renowned musician too. Once Nawab Saadat Ali Khan invited him to his chamber but he refused to go to him saying "If he is a ruler, I too am a prince (Syed). Why should he not come to me ?" When the Nawab heard this, he observed "I have a large number of subjects in my attendance. The only distinction Mir Ali possess is that he has become a Dom (professional singer)." Sensing trouble, Mir Ali made up his mind to migrate to the Deccan. On the intervention of the poet Insha, however, the Nawab relented and honoured him with a robe of honour.[50]

Later Nasir Khan, a singer of Tansen's family and his pupils, Mir Ali Hasan and Mir Bandey Hasan turned sozkhwani into a perfect musical art and bestowed respectability to it.[51] The Hasan brothers flourished during the reign of Nasiruddin Haider.

Well known female sozkhwans who lived in the reigns of the last two kings of Avadh, were Haideri Begum, Mohammadi Begum and Nanhi Begum.[52] Needless to say many of the female sozkhwans and nauha chanters were from amongst the courtesans who had perfected themselves in music. Mirza Jaffar Husain cites the names of Haider Jan, Mughal Jhan, Najja and others among the courtesans of Lucknow of early twentieth century who were reputed dirge chanters.[53] Among the male chanters of this period were Mir Muhammad Hussain alias Manjhu Saheb (1870-1944), Mir Hamza Ali Kinturi, Fazal Hussain and Nadir Saheb.[54]

The last item which was sometimes the first item of a majlis, was distribution of tabarruk which is equivalent of Hindu "prasad". The nobles of Avadh tried to excel each other on the quality of foodstuffs distributed as tabarruk. It was customary among them to send the tabarruk along with the invitation to special invitees beforehand. However, bulk of the tabarruk was always distributed at the end of the majlis which therefore, attracted large crowds of poorer people. The tabarruk in majlises held by upper classes, consisted of roti, meat, dalroti, pulao, kheer or sweets and the like. Nawab Amir Mahal, a begum of Wajid Ali Shah, used to distribute Kheer or pulao in large quantities in her majlises.[55] Pari Mahal, another begum of Wajid Ali Shah distributed khuntias or pots of kheer in her majlises.[56] In the post-Nawabi period, there was a prince, Siknder Qadar, who used to distribute two anna and four anna bits in his annual majlis held in the Imambara Mumtazul Ulema in Haiderganj.[57] In the Shahi Imambaras pulao, roti and meat as well as sheermal were distributed.[58] In several majlises tea or sherbet was also served. In his majlises, Nawab Asghar Husain Fakhir of Patanala used to serve tea with milk cream and distribute sherbet so generously that the dhobis of Patanala would collect sherbet enough to quench the thirst of their donkeys.[59]

Processions

Muharram processions were by far the most important public observance performed with great pomp and show in which the Nawabs and nobles actively participated and provided lavish financial support to the functions.

We find that up to the days of Nasiruddin Haider, no important processions were taken out till fourth Muharram. Mohammad Ali Shah who built Imambara Husainabad in 1837, was founder of the zarih procession on first of Muharram. He established the practice of keeping the famous wax Zarih first in the Asafi Imambara as a mark of respect to Asafuddaulah and then taking it in a procession to his newly built imambara via Chowk. The procession which was taken out on traditional lines till recently, was headed by a large black banner on which were inscribed verses in Arabic. It was followed by a naubatkhana with musicians playing shehnai and beating drums. Next in the procession was the sabeel i.e. large pitchers of water and sherbet, followed by elephants, camels and bands. On one of the elephants was carried the emblem of Mahe Maratib. Then came flag bearers, sontabardars and men carrying spears made of silver. These were followed by alams and marsiya and nauha chanters. At the tail end of the procession was taken the zarih, the main attraction and the principal item of the procession.[60]

The next important processions were taken out on 5th day of Muharram. These were processions of alams which were consecrated at the dargah of Hazrat Abbas. On this day, large crowds clad in black, would move in stream with alams in their hands, to the Dargah. The procession of alams from the Shahi Imambaras was always a grand show. At the head of the procession marched a military formation consisting of foot men, cavalry and horse soldiers.[61]

From Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, we get an interesting account of an alam procession of a noble which passed in front of her house on 5th Muharram. The arrangement and order of the procession followed the pattern of the royal procession described above. The tops of alams in the shape of spread hand or crescent, were made of silver set with precious stones. The banner attached to the alam was in the shape of a long scarf of rich silk of bright florid colours embroidered very deep at the ends which were furnished with gold and silver fringes.[62] It was caught together near the middle, and tied with rich gold and silver cards and tassels to the top of the scarf just under the hand or crest. The colours of the banner were blue, purple green, yellow etc. Red colour was however, avoided. The elephants in the processions, were followed by a band of musicians playing drums, fifes and trumpet.[63]

According to Mrs. Ali, the Arab horse used in the procession to represent the Duldul, the horse of Imam Husain used by him at Karbala, along with its costly attire was given in charity to a poor syed after Muharram.[64]

The poorer sections took their alams in a much simple manner to the Dargah. The owner himself carried his alam and the music consisted of a single drum and a fife.[65]

The Menhdi processions to commemorate the marriage of Qasim, son of Hazrat Imam Hasan, with Imam Husain's daughter, Fatima Kubra as per popular tradition, which is no longer universally accepted, were taken out on the seventh of Muharram. Menhdi is a purely Indian ritual observed by Shias of Lucknow as a part of marriage celebrations, which enjoins upon the bride's side to send menhdi along with other gifts to the bridegroom before the marriage ceremony. Therefore introduction of menhdi processions in Muharram observances was purely an Indian innovation.

Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali gives a vivid description of the Menhdi procession on seventh of Muharram, which started from the Minister's residence and terminated at Shah Najaf. We have already described how Shah Najaf was profusely decorated and illuminated to receive the menhdi. According to Mrs. Ali, the Minister's train consisted of 3,000 persons including match-lock soldiery. Along with serveral trays of menhdi, there were many other marriage gifts such as sweets, dried fruit and garlands of sweet jasmines. An imitative tomb on a bier symbolising Qasim's martyrdom at Karbala and a palkee and chandol of silver symbolic of bride's conveyance, formed part of the procession. There were several bands of music following innumerable torches. Elephants, camels and horses too were in the procession Mrs. Ali mentions that the Duldul also accompanied the trays of Menhdi.[66] It is possible that the horse was not the Duldul, but an ordinary horse which merely carried the articles to represent Qasim's headgear, weapons tect.[67] Mrs. Ali refers to a practice which she found amazing. The horse was made to move around the tazia. To her surprise, she found the horse pacing the tasselated floor in very slow time without once slipping. When the circuit was over, he was conducted back into the courtyard without the slightest accident or confusion. The Model of Qasim's tomb, chandol, palkee and the trays of menhdi were taken along with the King's tazia for burial at Karbala on 10th Muharram.[68]

The tenth of Muharram called Ashura i.e. the day on which Imam Husain and his male relations and companions were killed by the enemy, was the most important day of celebrations. This was also the day of burial of tazias in different Karbalas of the city.

To get an inkling of the celebrations on Ashura, let us again take the assistance of Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali. According to her, all persons moved torwards their chosen Karbala along with their tazias and alams. The poorer people joined the processions taken out by the affluent persons. Different processions converging at Karbalas were more or less similar. The consecrated banners were at the head of the processions and were carried by men on foot or on elephants. These were followed by bands of music. Behind them moved a sword bearer who carried swords suspended on a reversed bow fixed to a black staff. On each side of this gentleman, walked men bearing black poles fitted with large streamers of black unspun silk symbolizing grief, despair etc.[69] Behind them walked the Duldul caparisoned as on fifth Muharram and attended by a man with an aftaba (sun-shade), a well dressed groom, a man with the chowrie of peacock feathers in a silver handle, chobdars (staff-bearers) with large silver and gold staffs and sontabardars (bearers of silver stick or mace) with short staffs resembling fish, harkaras (running foot men) etc. The royal chhattah (umbrella) made of embroidered velvet, was supported over the head of the Duldul. The saddle was decorated with Imam Husain's chain armour, gold turban, a rickly set sword with an embroidered belt. The sacred horse was followed by bearers of loban (franking incense) in gold censers suspended to chains which were waved about to fill the air with its aroma. Next came the marsiyago chanting marsiya verses. He was attended by the taziadar and his relations who walked barefooted and bareheaded sometimes throwing chaff on their heads to express grief.[70] Next in order was the tazia surrounded by banners and covered with a canopy green bordered and embroidered with gold supported by poles. The model of Qasim's tomb and other articles of menhdi processions taken out on 7th Muharram found place behind the tazia. Then came the camels and elephants carrying the tent equipage and luggage of Husain. "The last and most judicious feature in this arrangement is the several elephants with confidential servants distributing bread and money to the poor. The bread given on the occasion is in great esteem among the females."[71]

Handed down to us is an eye account of the procession of the tazia of Sheikh Khuda Bux, a royal atishbaz who lived in the reign of Amjad Ali Shah recorded by Najabat Husain of Azimabad, The procession was headed by seven camels who were followed by seven elephants with black jhols. Their riders too were dressed in black. The elephants were carrying alams and banners with names of Allah and the Holy Five written on them in letters of gold or silver. Then came persons holding clubs, spears and batons. They were followed by foot soldiers armed with swords and spears. This portion of the procession was about one mile long. Then came bands of music which consisted of raushan chauki, jhanjah, turhi, duff, drums etc. These were followed by vessels of sherbet on wooden takhts. Sherbet was freely distributed among the spectators. Next in order were the alams and spread hands made of gold or silver and bedecked with jewels, followed by to or three Dulduls and Tabooth pierced with arrows. These were followed by hundreds of tazias of the poor. At the tail end of procession was the tazia of Khuda Bux surrounded by numerous mourners reciting marsiyas, nauhas and beating their breasts. They consisted of three distinct groups of the local people, the Negroes and the Mughals.[72]

The Tazias were buried on reaching the Karbala.

Chehlum Celebrations

Till the reign of Nasiruddin Haider, mourning lasted for ten days from 1st to 10th of Muharram. It is said that either Nasiruddin Haider or his mother Badshah Begum, had taken a vow that the prince would observe Muharram for forty days culminating in the Imam's Chehlum Ceremony[73] on the fortieth day if he became king of Avadh. When Nasiruddin succeeded his father as King of Avadh, he and his mother fulfilled their vow with great zeal and fanfare. The king's practice was quickly followed by his subjects and thus the mourning celebrations were continued till Chehlum which became another important day of mourning in which alams and tazia processions were taken out and the tazias were buried at the Karbalas. As a matter of fact, the mourning period continued even after Chehlum. It came to an end only on eighth Rabiulauval. On ninth Rabiulauval, Navin (Ninth Day) celebrations were held amidst great rejoicings and festivities to mark the death of Umar, son of Saad, the Commander of Yazid's troops at Karbala.

Observances at Household Level

While large majlises were organized in specially constructed Imambaras, most of well-to-do Shia families had an Imambara of their own within the premises of their homes. Those who could not afford a separate Imambara, used their best apartment as an Imambara.[74] Usually these Imambaras were used for zenana majlises to which entry of males was barred.[75] In the Imambara were kept ritual objects like tazias, alams, taboots etc. The tazias and alams were later taken out to join the procession of these sacred objects from public Imambaras.

Mourning Etiquette

During Muharram, the Shias practised great austerity in their lives. They discarded beds and slept on ordinary mats without using masnads and cushioned luxuries.

The meal consisted of coarsest food such as chapatis from barley flour of khichra (rice and peas boiled together) without ghee, salt, pepper or spices. Chewing pan was a taboo for ten days. Gotta, a poor substitute was used in its place. Women wore no ornaments and many of them did not change their dress for ten days. The expression of grief by ladies was far greater and more lasting than that of men. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali's aya did not take water or any other liquid during the ten days of mourning. In mourning the martyrs of Karbala, the Shias of Lucknow forgot their private grief.[76]

The grief of the Prophet's family was shared by the Nawabs, nobility and the common people alike. Badshah Begum, queen of Ghaziuddin Haider and her son, Nasiruddin Haider specially took care to observe mourning in an elaborate manner. Nasiruddin avoided public and ceremonial appearance as well as drinking revelries during the mourning period. He led a secluded life and shunned the company of foreigners. According to Suroor, 'notwithstanding this love for pleasures of life, such was the situation in Muharram that it was not possible for the way-farer to smile. The King wept day and night to mourn the Ahle-Bait. He slept on the ground and wore white or black dress. He would sigh or utter cries of grief till the fortieth day. The marsiyakhwans and syeds were rewarded with many and choicest gifts.'[77]

Nasiruddin Haider would himself carry tazias on his head on the first of Muharram. He kept awake during the nights. His mother, Badshah Begum, and wives Qudsia Begum. Malka Zamania and others would tie him with chains made of silver or gold and put a tauq of these medals round his neck[78] to commemorate the arrest of Imam Husain's sick son, Zainulabedin at Karbala.

Malka Kishwar, wife of Amjad Ali Shah, did not change her dress till Chehlum. She shunned use of menhdi and remained completely awake on the night of ninth Muharram. Everyone fasted on 10th of Muharram and even the babies were not given milk till the tazias were buried. During this period men and women lived in separate apartments.[79]

Muharram During Post Nawabi Period

The termination Nawabi rule in Avadh may have given a temporary setback to Muharram celebrations but it was certainly shortlived. From all accounts available, it is established that fervour for Muharram among the Lucknowites remained unabated. Because of permanent financial arrangements made by the Nawabs and Begums of Avadh, the celebrations in their own Imambaras were not affected much adversely. As a result of Wajid Ali Shah's patronage in Matiaburj, Muharram was observed there in Lucknow style. In fact the pomp and show at Matiaburj were even better than those of Lucknow. Wajid Ali Shah himself took a leading part in Muharram processions at Matiaburj. Sharar saw with his own eyes that the King was playing a tasha tied to his neck in a procession on seventh of Muharram. He also wrote and recited marsiyas in the majlises organized by him.[80]

In Lucknow of corresponding period, the nobles and some members of the royal family went ahead with tazia-dari and Muharram processions with great zeal displaying great pomp and show. Nawab Sultan Jahan Mahal, one of the begums of Wajid Ali Shah, started a menhdi procession in the post Nawabi period and created a trust under the management of her darogha, Wajid Ali, in order to perpetuate the procession. The darogha took out the procession himself during his life time. After his death in 1876, his descendants maintained the tradition.[81] Maulvi Asghar Husain who had married a grand daughter of Taj Mahal, used to take out an alam procession on fifth of Muharram to the Dargah of Hazrat Abbas in a grand style.[82]

Sarshar gives an interesting account of Muharram in the second half of the nineteenth century in his well known novel, Fisanai Azad.

Mian Azad, the hero of the novel, is on a visit to Lucknow to see Muharram celebrations. He finds the imambaras, specially the Imambara of Husainabad crowded with devotees. However, gone were the days of Piya Jane Alam (Wajid Ali Shah), the unmanageable crowds and the marsiyagos of those days. People remember them with nostalgia. Mian Azad is, however, impressed with the Imambaras of Mian Baqar, Meer Wajid Ali and Husainabad. Mian Azad then visits the imambaras of the courtesans like Mushtari, Gauhar and Haider Jan. All of their imambaras are crowded because not only devotees but also admirers of these courtesans among them being raiszade, throng these imambaras to hear the nauhas and soz in the magical voices of these seasoned singers. When Haider Jan was chanting the following lines to the accompaniment of sarangi, the audience writhed in pain and lauded her profusely:[83]

Abbas came out of tent, armed with weapons
Abbas went to the battle-field riding his horse.

On the Ashura, Mian Azad sees the various processions carrying tazias to the Karbala of Tal Katora. He specially notes of the tazias of ranga, barley, wax, cotton, peepal leaves, eggs and khils besides the Nine Yard Long Tazia, all of which were interned at Talkatora. Among the processionists, he spots the courtesans dressed in black with their heads bared.[84]

On the day of Chehlum, Mian Azad who visits Lucknow again finds that the celebrations have converged at the Karbala of Talkatora which presents the atmosphere of a grand fair. As far as you can see, there are crowds of people and a large number of horses, elephants, chariots, dolis and finuses. The members of the nobility and aristocracy are camping at the Karbala grounds for the last three days. Where he moves farther, he comes across groups of courtesans providing glamour to the fair. Presently Mian Azad hears sounds of music and looking up, he sees the long procession of the tazia of Nawab Mumtaz uddaulah. The musicians are playing music sitting on horseback. Then comes a platoon of four hundred foot-soldiers. The spear holders are clad red. Sportsmen are busy displaying their knowledge of gatka, hatkati etc. They are, followed by the mourners, weeping and uttering 'Hasan, Husain'. Next come about 35 tazias surrounded by alams, gold panjas and garlands of sweet smelling flowers. Last to come is the Duldul. The place thus vividly represents the Karbala scene.[85]

An inkling into Muharram celebrations in early twenties is provided by Mirza Jaffar Husain.

As soon as the women sighted the moon of Muharram, they broke their glass bangles and set aside their ornaments. In some of the upper class families, the ladies wore black cords and artificial jewellery. Both men and women wore black dress. They slept on the ground. The old, infirm and sick were made to lie on inverted cots. No one chewed pan but used gota made from saunf, coconut etc. Many did not give medicines to the sick for the first twelve days of Muharram. Many did not cook fried food or eat salt. These signs of mourning continued in a diluted form till the Chehlum.[86]

On Ashura day, the Shias fasted, this being the day of martyrdom of Imam Husain. They broke the fast about two hours before sunset by taking coarse food stuffs like parched grains, dal of urd, boiled rice and sag.[87]

Chehlum Celebrations

Let us have a description of Chehlum from Mirza Jaffar Husain.

The second phase of majlises lasted from 12th Muharram up to Chehlum. On Chehlum, the Karbala of Talkatora throbbed with life. The nobility, aristocracy and the courtesans lived in tents pitched at Karbala for three days. A large number of tazias were taken out on Chehlum day. The tazias of Nawab Mumtaz uddaulah and Nawab Babban (also mentioned by Sarsha) deserve special mention. The last mentioned person was in fact, a lady, a daughter of Prince Saeedulah. It was compulsory for every participant of the procession of this tazia to be barefooted and bare-headed.[88]

The last mourning procession was taken out in the morning of 8th Rabiulauval. It was the famous Chup (silent) Tazia which formed the main feature of this procession. The procession moved in pin-drop silence which was periodically interrupted by an announcer saying.[89]

'This is the carriage of Martyr of Karbala'.

It is said that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a noble, Nawab Asghar, could not bury his tazia on Ashura day having been arrested on a charge of murder. On being released on 7th Rabiulauval, he took out the tazia in a silent procession and buried it in the early hours of 8th Rabiulauval. As this day marked the end of the mourning period, the procession was taken out very quietly. This became a practice in subsequent years.[90]

Invoking Hasan, Husain

In course of time, several rituals and practices invoking Imam Hasan, Imam Husain and other martyrs of Karbala for health, prosperity and removal of difficulties and distresses came in vogue.

The ritual of Chehal Mimberi (Forty Pulpits) began in the period of Nawab Shujauddaulah from the Imambara of Agha Baqar. On fulfilment of a wish, the devotee would visit forty Imambaras in the night of Ashura and light two candles on each mimber. The condition was that he would not talk to any one on the way. Usually the ritualistic journey began from the Imambara of Agha Baqar and terminated in the Imambara of the Chaudhrain. To make the performance of the ritual easy, Hakim Syed Mohammad Usuf Husain constructed an Imambara which he named Jannat Ki Khirkee (Window of the Paradise) in which he provided models of forty mimbers on a large mimber enabling the devotee to complete the ritual at one place.[91]

On seventh Muharram i.e. the Night of Menhdi, the ladies placed red and green wax lights, the former for Imam Husain and the latter for Imam Hasan in front of tazias to seek the Imam's intercession for solution of their problems.[92]

The fulfilment of a mannat (wish) took several forms in the light of the vow made. The person concerned was mortgaged to the Imam by putting on red cord sometimes interwoven with small rings of silver in the neck. The children carried cloth bags; suspended round their necks and collected alms as Imam's faquirs. Children were also dressed to be Saqqas (water men) and carried small leather bags on their backs containing milk or sherbet which they offered to people to show their reverence to Hazrat Abbas. On sixth of Muharram, children put on tauqs round their necks and chains on their feet to remember imprisonment of Imam Zainul Abedin. These remained on their persons till Chehlum. Depending on the vow, the ceremony of imprisonment was undergone every year for a specified period, say 5 years, 10 years or even 15 years.[93]

It was considered meritorious to give charity to feed the poor and to offer cold water and sherbet during Muharram. Sabeels were kept at suitable places on the routes of processions. Sayyan, Chaudhri of the Shuhdas, used to keep a Sabeel in Raja Ki Bazar.[94] Similarly langars (free food) were offered at fixed places or in processions.

Observances by Non-Shias

Now that we have examined, in some detail, Muharram observances and rituals, it is germane to point out that Sunni Muslims and Hindus too played important roles in these celebrations. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali found that the Hindus bowed their heads solemnly when they approached a tazia.[95] Hindu functionaries of the state and bankers spent large sums on Muharram observances and illuminations.[96] Many Hindus and Sunni Muslims kept tazias and participated in processions and set up sabeels and langars. Shias, Sunnis and Hindus alike, especially the women folk, had great faith in the supernatural and benevolent powers of Imam Husain, his family members and companions. So they all used to invoke them, made offerings and performed rituals for fulfilment of their wishes. It has to be stressed again that the Nawabs and Shia nobility drew profusely from local lore in enlarging, expanding and enriching Muharram observances with the result that many local Hindu rituals and concepts were accommodated in these celebrations, an apt example being menhdi procession on 7th Muharram. The Menhdi ritual was not only Indian but a localized affair. Perhaps this prompted Butler to observe in 1839 that "the religious excitability of the Muslims of Oude seems to be rather lower than that of their co-religionist in Rohilkhand, in Haiderabad state or even in Bengal."[97]

In fact, Muharram celebrations and observances were in keeping with the best traditions of the composite and mosaic culture of Lucknow and offered unique example of national integration and secularization of religion. We have quoted Sarojani Naidu's lines about Lucknow's Imambaras. We conclude by quoting a few lines of an Urdu poet.

When people come for ziarat in Muharram
One hears a heavenly voice in the moonlit night.
Move with reverence for it is an unusual shrine.
The angles bow their heads here, it is the tomb of King of Kings.

And the poet was no Shia devotee of Imam Husain but a Kashmiri Pandit of Lucknow, Brij Narain Chakbast.

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4

RELIGIOUS AND RITUAL RAMIFICATIONS

Whither Kaaba, whither Temple, how can the drunken know?
Their lives, they spent in thy distillery O'bartender.
—*Rind*

We have described in some detail, the celebrations and observances connected with Muharram in the preceding chapter. The spirit of Muharram was, however, not confined to the accepted period of mourning i.e. from first of Muharram to 8th Rabiulauval only i.e. a span of 66 or 67 days. As the Shias felt that grieving for Husain had precedence over all other griefs, majlises were held as a part of death rites in Shia families. The Shias also mourned the deaths of other Imams. In fact, all possible efforts were made and every opportunity was seized to remind the people of the Tragedy of Karbala, It would be no exaggeration to say that the Shias were a community in perpetual mourning.

However, these periods and spells of mourning were punctuated with joyous celebrations like Imam's birthdays, festivals and fairs. The Nawabs of Avadh who were so fond of entertainment and pleasures of life, celebrated them with great zeal and gusto and spent large funds on such occasions.

The rulers of Avadh did not mind to give a slant to some rituals and religious practices to suit their life-style and tastes then prevailing in society. No wonder, they and their begums introduced many innovations and variations in the Shia religious practices and rituals which not only made their celebration interesting and popular but won for them a certain degree of acceptance from non-Shia population in general and Hindus in particular.

Nasiruddin Haider to whom the Lucknowites largely owe the present style of Muharram celebrations and his mother, Badshah Begum, wife of Ghaziuddin Haider played leading roles in shaping and formulation of certain rituals and ceremonies. Many of these were, however, later discarded on the intervention of the Ulema or were gradually abandoned after the death of the son and mother.

Birth and Marriage Anniversaries of Imams

Nasiruddin Haider was responsible for organization of birthday celebrations of the Imams as festivals. Near Farrukh Baksh Palace, he constructed a stately building called "The Shrine of Twelve Imams", consisting of twelve large halls each assigned to each of the twelve Imams. These halls were lavishly decorated and furnished at a huge cost.[1] On the birthday of each Imam, joyous celebrations and mahfils were organised and on his death anniversary, majlises were held to mourn his death in the hall earmarked for him. The birth ceremonies were held for six days. Similarly the death too, was mourned for a number of days. Fruits, sweets, sherbet and food, all rich and delicious and sometimes costly dresses were distributed to the participants who consisted of mostly begums, women working in the palace and eunucks.[2]

As a part of birthday celebrations, the ritual of Chhatti (Sixth Day Ritual) was also observed. The Chhatti of Imam-ul-Asr (present Imam, i.e. the twelfth and last Imam) specially was celebrated in a grand style on the lines of Janam Ashtmi, in which the whole lying in room was reproduced.[3]

It is said that sometimes when the birth anniversary of an Imam occurred, Nasiruddin Haider would himself act as the mother in labour and pretend to be in great pain. Ultimately he would pretend to deliver the baby which was in fact a doll made of gold or silver. This would be followed by joyous celebrations and Chhatti bath on the sixth day. For a good omen, the King would stagger out in the night of Chhatti holding the baby in his lap to see the stars on the sky. The whole ceremony was called Achhuta.[4]

Badshah Begum selected beautiful daughters from poor syed families and made them imaginary wives of the eleven Imams, the twelfth Imam being unmarried. They were called achhuties (untouched ones). To the list of the eleven Imams were later added the names of Hazrat Abbas and Hazrat Qasim and for them, too, young ladies were selected as wives.

Nasiruddin Haider also introduced the local ceremonies of Sanchaq and Menhdi as part of marriage anniversary celebrations.

In course of time, a large number of women were drafted as achhuties. Although these ladies were treated with great respect and had all the comforts of life, they were doomed to a forced life of celibacy because being Imams' wives, they could not marry. It is said that in order to rid herself of this forced maidenhood, one of the achhuties told Badshah Begum sobbingly of a dream in which the Imam appeared before her in a state of anger and said to her, 'I divorce you'. Having heard this, Badshah begum sent her to her home.[5] Thus she was able to lead a normal life of her choice.

Ultimately their number and problems attracted the attention of Maulana Syed Mohammad who persuaded the King to marry off these girls. There is still a lane in Lucknow called Achhutie Gali after the name of these maidens.[6]

Festivals

The Nawabs and the nobility also celebrated many festivals other than those connected with Imams' birthdays, with gaiety and grandeur. On the conclusion of Ramzan, Id-ul-Fitr was celebrated by all Muslims. After Id prayers, the first morning meal taken in each house consisted of plain boiled rice with curd and sugar supplemented with dried dates. Sewayyan (vermecelli) eaten with sugar and cold milk was the dainty of the day in every house from the king to the meanest of his subjects. The zenana rang with loud music, mainly by domanies. The lady of the house received nazranas from dependants and on her turn, distributed gifts among them. The gentlemen passed the day in visiting friends and listening to music by dancing girls. Nautch women were summoned to the male apartments to add colour and gaiety to the celebration but they were excluded from the female apartments of the better sorts of people. Seated on his throne, the King received congratulations and nazranas from his courtiers and dependants and in return, bestowed khillat to ministers, officers of State and favourites.[7]

During Nawabi days, Baqr Id, was observed on a much grander scale than Idul-Fitr. The day's celebrations began with sacrifice of animals at the Idgah by the King. The King rode in a grand procession consisting of his suite, cavalry, foot soldiers and artillery as well as elephants with their heads painted and with howdahs of gold or silver and camels carrying swivels and the dunkah (kettle drum) on a richly ornamented horse.[8] The King's suite was made up of the Resident, English guests in court dress, the vazier and nobility on elephants accompanied by military regiments playing English music. The King's carriage composed of chiefly silver, was open on every side with a canopy, of crimson velvet embroidered and fringed with gold.[9] It was drawn by elephants who were exactly similar. The chowries, and aftaba were flourished before him. The King's entourage was succeeded by the royal palkie and a gold palkie supported by richly attired bearers, carried on an elegant state carriage drawn by eight black horses with a European coachman.[10]

When the procession reached the Idgah, the King was presented a knife by the head mullah to perform the sacrifice of the camel selected as an offering by the King. The exact moment of the sacrifice was announced by a signal when a grand salute from the artillery and infantry started the day's celebrations.[11]

After prayers at the Idgah, the King returned to the palace in the procession. He received nazrana in the Throne Room and also conferred titles and khillats to his nobles and dependants. If a dignitary was excluded, it meant, he was no longer in King's favour.[12]

The King used to throw out a banquet on the Baqr Id day to which were invited the Resident, his suite and such of nobility who were privileged to the chair at the royal banquet.[13] This was followed by animal fights.[14]

Then the King withdrew to his private apartments and he spent the evening in witnessing musical performances by dancing girls and fire works and enjoying witticisms of jesters.[15]

The rich sent presents of goats and sheep to their neighbours and the poor to enable the latter to perform the sacrifice. Millions of animals were sacrificed on this day.[16]

The well to do distributed new dresses to their dependants and the poor. The families of bride and bridegroom elect exchanged animals. The tutor wrote verses and presented to his pupil. In return he was rewarded with dress and money to enable him to celebrate Id. The ladies donned their costliest jewels and dress to receive guests and to pay visits.[17]

From Sarshar, we get an inkling of how the nobles celebrated Baqr Id in the post-Nawabi period. It was customary for girls to dye their hands with menhdi on the eve of Id. On the Id day, every one rose early in the morning, many nobles took their baths not at their houses but at the commercially run hamams. Usually sheep, goats and rams were slaughtered in sacrifice which was performed at the residence itself. Both men and women put on new and costly clothes and the latter decorated themselves with ornaments and bangles. Nazranas were offered to the lady of the house who distributed Idi (Cash gift) to the younger members of the family and dependants. Prayers were offered at the Idgah where a mela was also held.[18] Clad in their best dresses, the people moved about in the fair. To quote Sarshar in his own words, "Takhats covered with white sheets have been placed. Hookahs are ready. Fire is alit in basins. There are two persons in attendance to fill chillums. People enter tents to have a smoke. In the stall of one of the saquins, a natini is singing. In another stall, a carefree young thing is reciting phabtis. The shops of halwais are crowded. The opium addicts have gathered in large numbers. Toy stalls are having roaring business."[19]

Dalis were presented by the serving classes who were suitably rewarded by the head of the family. Mahfils were held in the evening. Dominis amused the ladies in the Zenana with their songs, jesting and mimicry whereas the courtesans entertained the men with their songs, dances and flowery conversation throughout the night.[20]

Nauroze (New Year's Day)

This is an Iranian festival which was introduced to Lucknowites by the Nawabs of Avadh who had an Iranian descent. It may be mentioned that the festival had been earlier observed during the Muslim rule in India but was abolished by Aurangzeb on the ground that it was a distinctly Shia festival.[21] It commences on the day when the sun enters Aries. The exact moment when the Sun enters Aries was calculated and publicised by the astrologers who also prescribed the colour of the dress to be worn on the occasion. For instance, if the entry took place at mid night, the colour would be dark, almost black, while if it occurred at mid-day, brightest crimson was adopted and everyone from the king to the lowliest of his subject wore the prescribed colour,[22] If the Nauroze occurred in day time, the ladies threw a freshly plucked rose in a basin of water, blossom downwards. It was believed that the rose would turn over by itself when the Sun entered the Sign of Aries.[23]

On this day eggs were boiled hard. Some of these were painted in different colours and others were decorated with gilding. These as well as dried fruits, nuts, confectionary and cakes were put in small earthen plates lacquered over to resemble silver. These were distributed as presents to which young people especially looked forward eagerly.[24]

The king held a ceremonial darbar and received congratulations and nazrana from his nobles, courtiers and dependants. He also threw a public breakfast on the occasion.[25]

Friday Functions in Savana

Ceremonies were performed on each Friday in the month of Savana in remembrance of Prophet Ilias (Elisha) and to petition Imam Mahdi.[26]

A small replica of boat was prepared from bamboo and covered with a covering of gold and silver tissue, silk or coloured muslin ornamented with silver paper. In the boat were put lighted earthen lamps. The boat, called Illias Ki Kishti (Elisha's Boat) was taken in a procession to the river Gomti and floated on the river amidst a flourish of trumpets and drums.[27]

Many people wrote petitions to Imam Mahdi on Fridays and consigned the paper to the river with much reverence. The procession was repeated every succeeding Friday till the object was accomplished.[28]

The Nawabs of Avadh also adopted many local festivals which because of their patronage, were celebrated by the Hindus and Muslims alike.

Basant (Spring Feast)

For example, on the occasion of Basant, the whole of Lucknow from the King downwards wore dresses of basant (saffron) colour. No one who did not wear a basanti dress, could be admitted in Court. The trappings of horses, camels and elephants too were saffron. The King held his darbar, gave a public breakfast and attended an exhibition sport of animal fights.[29]

In Fisanai Azad, we find an interesting account of Basant during post-Nawabi period. According to Mian Azad, the whole of Lucknow wore yellow. Even the sweets on sale were yellow. Melas were held. People thronged the Dargah of Shah Mina where women, mainly courtesans, came in large numbers. The dancing girls gave their superb performance to the accompaniment of sarangis, Qauwals sang qauwali to enthuse the devotees.[30]

Another festival which was celebrated with gusto by the Nawabs was Holi. Nawab Asafuddaulah, Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and later Shahzada Sulaiman Shikah, a prince of

Delhi who had settled at Lucknow, celebrated Holi as a state festival. Asafuddaulah observed all the prevalent rituals of Holi. Special sessions of dances, swangs and fireworks were organized amidst great rejoicings. We have it from Mirza Qateel, a contemporary poet that on the occasion of Holi, the women of the palace put up fancy dress shows. They dressed themselves as Mughal males, Europeans uttering English words, green grocers, recluses etc. They mimicked tigers and other animals and chased men.[31]

Diwali too, was observed by the Muslims. Many indulged in gambling. In any case almost every one lighted earthen lamps and purchased sugar toys. Not doing so, was considered inauspicious.[32]

Fairs

Besides festivals, a large number of melas which provided fun and diversion to the Lucknowites, were also held. The common characteristic of all the fairs, was that the courtesans visited them in large numbers and formed one of the main attractions of the fair.

On every Thrusday in General and on Nauchandi (first Thrusday of the lunar month, in particular, melas were held at the Dargah of Hazarat Abbas. The dargah being held in great esteem, the palace ladies and nobility too visited the dargah on Nauchandi. Similarly on every Nauchandi, a fair was held at the Dargah of Shah Mina. Here the main attractions were dancing and qauwalli.[33]

Many fairs were held at Aishbagh. The Savana Mela was held there with great fan-fare. The fair of Tar too, was held there immediately after Id-ul-Fitr.[34] In this fair, the opium addicts of the whole city gathered and held a mushaira of their own.[35] Adjacent to the garden was Motijhil whose water exhibited the splendour of the Stream of Life and pleased the hearts of the thirsty.[36]

Wajid Ali Shah founded the Fair of Qaiserbagh in 1852 which was held annually. It is stated that Wajid Ali Shah was dressed in clothes dyed with red ochre on his birthdays. So when he became king, he decided to hold a mela on this occasion.[37] The main speciality of the fair was enactment of a drama (called rahas) in which Wajid Ali Shah himself played the role of Krishna and some of his 'paris' acted as gopis. Common people were admitted in Qaserbagh to witness the drama provided they too wore clothes dyed in red ochre.[38]

The Fair of Athon was held at the Tikait Rai's Tank where the Raja had constructed a temple for Hindus and a mosque for Muslims. Sports, mushairas and handicrafts were the main attractions of this mala.[39] Even during the post Nawabi period, it remained a flourishing fair as depicted by Sarshar. We find that a large number dandies and young people visited the fair for nazzarabazi i.e. to gaze at courtesans who came to the fair in vehicles. Many swang actors and jugglers showed their tricks. Some one devoured an ignited piece of coal. Another chewed iron like gram.[40]

Besides these regular melas, whenever matches, cock-fights, partridge fights etc. were held, large number of people gathered to witness the sport. On such occasions, stalls were set up, hawkers moved about with eatables, hookahs and cold water.

The main characteristics of a Lucknow mela as depicted in Tilism-e-Hosh Ruba can be summarized as follows.

Among the gathering were opium addicts, dandies and womanizers. Among the stall holders were female hookah keepers who bewitched their customers, female betel sellers wearing gold ornaments who were experienced and wicked. The courtesans pitched their tents in another block with arrangements for mujra and music.[41]

Life Cycle rituals

In Lucknow's ritualistics and affluent society, the life-cycle rituals from birth to death, were observed in a ceremonial manner and usually on a lavish scale.

Child birth

Birth of a male baby brought greater joy than that of a female child. The birth of a son was announced by a discharge of artillery among the nobility who kept cannons or by musketry by others. The ladies in labour were assisted by other ladies and female servants. No trained nurses were available.[42]

On the fourth day after child birth, the birth of a son was celebrated in a festive manner in which families of both mother and father participated. There were much singing and dining.[43]

The infant was laid in soft beaten cotton with little clothing. On the ninth day, it was well bathed, its head well oiled and the fillet which was deemed necessary till that day, thrown aside. The baby was then dressed in a thin muslin loose shirt edged and bordered with silver ribands and a small cap was put on his head.[44]

The first food given to an infant after birth was guthli, a medicinal condomium made from amaltas (cassia fistula), a vegetable aperient, sugar and distilled water of aniseed. After this feed, the baby remained without any food for three days after which he was fed on anna's milk. The baby was given a small dose of opium daily till the age of three or four years.[45]

The Aqiqa or the head shaving ceremony was observed on the fortieth day after the baby's birth. The head was shaved by a barber. On this occasion, the mother took bath and dressed herself in a costly dress. Friends and relatives offered presents and nazarana which included necklaces set with precious stones, bangles and other ornaments of precious stones. A taweez of gold or silver engraved with verses from the Quran, strung on cords of gold thread, was suspended round its neck. Goats were sacrificed on this occasion.[46]

Birth Day

The Urdu term used was Salgirah (Year-Knot) because according to the custom, a knot was tied every year on a string maintained for the purpose in case of boys. However, the girl's years were counted by a silver loop or ring added yearly to the gardani (silver neck-rings). The birth day was celebrated with music and fire works. Dinner was provided to the guests, as well as to the poor. The anna was given many gifts.[47]

The ceremony of Kheer Chatai took place when the baby was about five months old. The baby was given kheer, a preparation of rice and sugar elaborately prepared.[48]

Dudh Burhai ceremony or weaning the baby from breast feeding, was observed when the baby was about two years old. Sweets were distributed among friends and relatives. The child was dissuaded to drink milk from the breasts by applying a solution of aloes or some other bitter substance on the breasts.[49] Mujras were held to celebrate the occasion.[50]

The ceremony of Bismillah or first reading took place when the child was about four years of age. He was dressed in new clothes and a teacher called maulvi or ataliq was appointed to teach him. The teacher started with making the child say Bismillah (in the name of God) and teach him to read a few alphabets from the qaida (Arabic primer).[51]

The Khatna ceremony was observed when the male child was seven years old. The boys were circumscised in accordance with an ancient custom adopted by Islam. When the boy came out of confinement after healing, he was taken in a grand procession to the Dargah of Hazarat Abbas for thanks giving. Money was distributed to the poor at the Dargah and also on the way back. Silver and copper coins were thrown to the crowd gathered along the procession.[52]

The ceremony of Roza Kushai or Breaking the First Fast was observed when boys and girls were about nine or ten. A large feast was held to celebrate the occasion, but there was no singing or dancing.

Marriage Ceremonies

The ceremonies connected with settlement of marriage, marriage and after-marriage, were a prolonged affair spreading over months and in many cases, years. On each occasion money was spent lavishly and extravagantly.

The first step towards finalization of a marriage was the mangani (betrothal) ceremony solemnized soon after a successful marriage negotiation which was usually conducted with the help of mashshatas i.e. female match-makers.

For mangani and marriage negotiations, age of the boy or girl was no consideration and he or she had no say in the matter. It only concerned the elders of the two families concerned. Sometimes, the marriage was settled soon after a child was born or in some cases even 'before actual birth' if parents of the boy and girl to be born were intimate friends and wanted to cement their friendship with everlasting relationship by a marriage tie. In any case, it was very common to negotiate marriage and ratify the agreement with the mangani ceremony when the boys and girls were small, say below ten years. For instance, Wajid Ali Shah settled the marriage of his daughter, Mehr Ara Sughra Begum from his wife Nawab Izzat Mahal, when she was below five years of age.[53] On this occasion mahfils of qauwals and poets as well as drink parties which the participants remembered for years, were held at Shah Manzil. The mangani of Wajid Ali Shah himself had, however, been performed when he was fifteen and the marriage took place a few months later.[54]

Istikhara (Consulting divine will) was a must before settling a marriage. If Istikhara was in the negative, the negotiations were immediately dropped.

Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali describes the various steps taken before holding the mangani ceremony. Initiative in marriage negotiations was invariably taken by the boy's side. Here is her description of how a marriage proposal was conveyed to a girl's parents from boy's side.

"On a silver tray covered with gold brocades and fringed with silver, was laid youth's pedigree traced by a neat writer in the Parsian Character in richly embossed paper ornamented and emblazoned with gold figures. On the tray with the pedigree, was laid a nazrana of five gold mohurs and twenty-one rupees (the lucky number). A brocaded cover fringed with silver, was spread over the whole and this was conveyed by the male agent to the young begum's father".[55]

If the proposal was accepted, the tray and its contents were retained. If not, they were returned then and there.[56] In the case mentioned by Mrs. Ali, the contents were accepted.

A few days later, a female from the girl's family visited the boy's home and stayed for a few days to make a general scrutiny of the zenana and its inmates. She also discussed many other matters and it was decided that the marriage should take place in about twelve months' time when the girl would be over thirteen years.[57]

To make the settlement of the marriage public, the mangani ceremony was held shortly afterwards. Mrs. Ali herself was chosen by the boy's side to officiate for the family at the girl's place.

On the day of mangani, boy's side sent in trays a costly drees, a ruby ring, gold earrings and flower ornaments for the head, neck, wrists and ankles formed from sweet scented jasmine for the bride as well as choice confectionary, pan and fruits to the girl's house. The trays were taken ceremoniously in a procession under escort of soldiers with a band of music.[58]

When Mrs. Ali entered the house of the girl, she was presented a dress by the other side, which she put on over the clothes she was already wearing. She was then led to the young lady, a little girl seated on a carpet of rich embroidery, her face resting on her knees in apparent bashfulness. In accordance with the custom, Mrs. Ali decorated the girl with ornament of gold and flowers brought by her from the boy's side. She also dressed her in the gold tissue dress sent by the boy's side and placed the ring on the forefinger of her right hand. Then she embraced the girl before her mother and fed her with seven pieces of candy as per custom. She then left the girl's room and joined the ladies. She was entertained by the mother with sherbet in silver basins brought by slave girls. Each person taking sherbet, deposited a gold or silver coin in the tray. The money so collected, was given to the bride in accordance with the custom.[59] With this ended the mangani ceremony.

Among the poorer families, the mangani was performed by sending a rupee in a silk cord (i.e. Imam Zamin) which was tied on the girl's arm.[60]

In the post-Nawabi period too, Imam Zamin in a highly embroidered and decorated band of red atlas was ceremoniously taken on a silver tray in a procession accompanied by an English band. Many relations and mehris formed the procession.[61]

In the intervening period between mangani and marriage, presents were exchanged between the two families if any festival or festivity took place. For instance, Baqr Id occurred between, the mangani and wedding of the couple cited by Mrs. Ali, boy's side sent to the girl's parents thirty-five sheep and goats of the finest breed with trays of pan covered with enamelled foils and ripe fruits of the season ceremoniously in a procession accompanied by servants, soldiers and a band of music. The other side sent presents in return consisting of the same number of animals and a variety of skull caps 'supposed to be her (bride's) own work in spangles and embroidery'.[62]

A few days previous to the marriage, the ceremony of manjha or seclusion took place. The bride dressed in yellow dress, was confined to a special room.[63] The bridegroom too was put in seclusion. He wore the yellow dress sent by the girl's side. On the eve of his first marriage, Wajid Ali Shah was dressed in yellow clothes during the manjha ceremony but because of two deaths in the family, the marriage had to be deferred with the result that he continued to wear the manjha clothes for two months, which had become very dirty.[64]

The girl's side used to send the manjha dress for the boy in a grand manner. Trays containing the manjha dress, pindis and butna were sent in a procession similar to those described earlier.[65]

When Nasir-uddin Haider settled his marriage with Mumtaz-ul-Dahr who was related to his minister, Raushanuddaulah, he was persuaded to undergo all the marriage ceremonies. A description of the manjha ceremony has been handed down to us by the author of Darbar-e-Avadh. Thousands of trays containing pindis, a golden chauki covered with embroidered red velvet and a lota and katora of gold securely tied to it and a number of takhats formed part of the procession. On many of these takhats, renowned dancing girls of Lucknow performed mujra. Then there were takhats displaying Laila and Manjnun, Shrin and Ferhad, Wamiq and Uzra. On the takhats following these, sat jugglers, acrobats and swang actors. One would lift a degh with his teeth, another could chew up a whole glass bottle. Bands of music, posse of soldiers and a number of ladies in vehicles accompanied by their mehris, too formed the procession.[66]

A wedding occupied three days and consisted of three important ceremonies, sanchaq on the first day, menhdi on the second and barat on the third. All the three days and nights were spent in merriment in the zenana where ladies smoked hookah, ate rich food, chatted or sang or heard songs sung by the dominies.[67]

Sanchaq procession started from the bridegroom's place. It carried an elaborate and heavily embroidered dress, metal and floral ornaments for the bride and fruits, sweets and many other presents contained in earthen-ware pitchers elaborately decorated.[68]

Describing the sanchaq ceremony of Mirza Qaiwan Qadar, heir apparent to Wajid Ali Shah, Suroor remarks in his typical flowery style that on the sanchaq day, the number of workers summoned from far and near, was so large that the adjoining busties looked deserted and the agricultural work of the zamindars was completely paralysed. From evening till morn, pitchers of gold and silver and takhats displaying decorations were carried (to the bride's house). But many of them could not be despatched (for want of labour).[69]

In contrast to the sanchaq procession, the menhdi procession started from the house of the bride next evening. According to the custom, the bride's side sent henna, wedding dress and many other presents for the bridegroom in a ceremonial manner. Among the presents mentioned by Mrs. Ali, were confectionary, dried fruits, sugar candy, fire-works concealed in flowers composed of transparent abrak (talc) which were later set out in flames called chaman (flower beds). The trays were covered with dome-shaped baskets on which were thrown drapers made from gold cloth and brocades neatly, firinged in bright colours. Female friends of the bride's family came along with the procession in covered conveyances and men used horses, elephants or palkis. Bands of music, soldiers and servants were the usual feature.[70]

After the procession reached the bridegroom's house, the menhdi ceremony was performed in the zenana. The dulah was seated on a stool near the purdah and moist menhdi was then applied on his hands and feet in bandages by the female relations of the bride. It took about an hour to fix the dye bright. While outside the zenana there were deafening sounds from drums and trumpets, inside the zenana, there were singing by female singers and lively dialogues with the female guests. According to the custom, pieces of sugar candy were presented to the dulha to eat while his hands and feet were bound in menhdi bandages. The candy would be taken to his mouth and when he made an attempt to eat, it would be withdrawn. The teasing went on till the youth managed to catch a piece and also a finger to the amusement of those present.[71]

When the menhdi bandages were removed, the groom's old anna helped him to wash off henna leaves and dry his hands and feet. She rubbed him with otto and robed him in the dress brought by the bride's side. Bowing, he then returned to the male apartment to be greeted with a flourish of trumpets and confabulations. Nazranas were also offered to him. Dinner was served at about midnight followed by pan, hookah, fireworks and mujra till dawn. In the zenana, the bride's party took sherbet and pan immediately after the bridegroom had left and returned to the bride's house.[72]

The third day is the day of aqd or nikah. The boy's side formed a barat i.e. a procession to fetch the bride. Prior to the marriage of Wajid Ali Shah, the barats used to start at about 3 A.M. Wajid Ali Shah's marriage procession was delayed and started after day break. Since then it became a practice for the barat to move out at about 9 or 10 A.M.[73]

We get an idea of barat and nikah in pre-Wajid Ali Shah days from Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali. The gentlemen assembled at the house of the bridegroom in the evening preceding the nikah day and spent the night in smoking hookah and amusing themselves with nautch, singing and fire works. At the appointed time, they set out in a procession to fetch the bride. Many elephants, conveyances, bands of music and soldiers were pressed into service. A few ladies too accompanied the barat to bring home the bride. The bridegroom rode a handsome charge whose legs, tail and mane were dyed in henna. He wore a dress made of gold cloth with matching turban to the top of which was tied the sehra, a large bunch of silver trimmings which fell over his face and hid it from public view.[74] Fanny Parkes described a sehra thus "Across his forehead was bound a sort of fillet made of an embroidery of pearls from which large strings of gold hung down all over his face to his saddle bow and to his mouth he kept a red silk handkerchief closely pressed to prevent devils entering his mouth."[75]

On reaching the bride's place, the processionists were entertained with fire works, music and singing.

Action to prepare the bride to go with her groom, was initiated early in the day. Menhdi was applied to her hands and feet. Then she was bathed, dried and her hair oiled. Her hair was ceremoniously dressed and her lips, gums and teeth were dyed with antimony. She was then clothed in the wedding dress and decorated with ornaments including the rings which were placed on her fingers and toes and the nuth (nose ring) sent by the bridegroom's side which she wore on her nose.[76]

Arrangements were then made in the zenana for holding the marriage ceremonies. In the Central hall, a six feet square takhat was decorated to be the seat of the bride. On it lay a masnad of gold brocade. Sitting at the masnad, she was surrounded by ladies. Then purdahs were let down to enable the maulvis, the two fathers and a few male friends as well as the groom to enter the zenana for nikah ceremony. The maulvis obtained the consent of bride and bride-groom for being joined in wedlock, settled the dowry (which may be, ten, twenty or perhaps a hundred lac of rupees) and then recited passages in

Arabic stating the terms of marriage contract. The nikah over, all the gentlemen except the bridegroom, left the zenana. The bridegroom was seated on the masnad by the side of his bride whose face he was shown in a mirror placed before the young couple according to the custom.[77]

After ceremonies were over, the groom carried his wife in his arms to the waiting chandola, in which she was ceremoniously taken away to the groom's place with drum of noisy music along with the rich dowry given by the parents.[78]

The bride returned to her parental home along with the bridegroom. The same evening, the Chauthi ceremony was held. On this occasion, the bride was dressed in the best possible dress made from costliest cloth, which was richly embroidered. In the festivities, fun and frolick of Chauthi also participated the bridegroom's female relations.[79]

The couple returned to the bridegroom's place a day or two later. Then began the Char Chale. Under the prevailing practice, the couple was invited by the bride's relations to stay with them overnight turn by turn. The couple was lavishly treated and given presents of clothes and jewellery.[80]

Many interesting omens, taboos and superstitions were connected with the marriage celebrations. In fixing the dates for marriage ceremonies, the position of moon was considered of paramount importance as already described. Care was taken not to sneeze when a ritual was being performed.[81] In the Sanchaq procession, one or two fish were tied to a pitcher as a mark of good luck.[82] The bride groom wore sehra to hide his face in order to ward off evil spirits. The water to be used to bathe the bride on the wedding day, was kept for seven days before use. The bride was made to take bath at mid-night with this cold water even during severe winter nights.[83] When the bride was taken to the groom's house after nikah, a male goat was slaughtered and its blood was applied to the groom's thumb and he was given kheer to eat.[84] The bridegroom also said prayers using a portion of the bride's veil as the prayer mat.[85]

Last Rites

The dead body of a Shia Mussalman was placed in a wooden coffin which was made of sandal-wood in case of nobility[86] and was covered with a doshala. The coffin was taken under the shade of a canopy by Kashmiris[87] or Shuhdas to a public bath or river for washing the body. If the deceased belonged to the royalty or nobility, the bath was given in the river after fixing a takhat on the water and setting up an enclosure with the help of poles and qanat (tent). Before bath, besan was applied on the body to purify it. It was then, bathed with pure water and camphor water successively.[88] Then powdered camphor was rubbed on hands, feet, knees and forehead i.e. all such limbs which, touched the ground when the deceased had prostrated in prayer during his or her life time.[89] The body was then wrapped in a Kafan (a winding sheet) on which were usually written verses from the Quran. Many in high places got the Kafan from Karbala.[90]

The coffin was then taken in a procession to the burial ground. The coffin was then gently placed near the grave facing towards Mecca. The Maulana, the Mujtahid-ul-Asr, himself in case of a distinguished personality, then led the Namaze-Janaza or burial prayer. The body was lowered in the grave. The kafan was then unfastened in order to uncover the face. A lump of earth was put beneath the right cheek and the right shoulder was gently shaken by one of those present. At this time, talquin, a passage of instructions in Arabic, was read by the officiating priest. After reading talquin, he slowly moved forty measured paces backwards in a line and then turned round and came back to the grave. Standing on the edge of the grave, he said prayers for mercy of God on the departed soul. The funeral service over, the grave was filled with planks and then covered with earth. All those present too threw handfuls of earth in the grave.[91] The mourners then left but in case of well off families, the grave was not left alone for at least forty days. Paid readers of Quran were harnessed to attend the grave. In case of royalty and nobility, such an arrangement continued for years.[92]

The Karbalas and Imambaras were used as burial grounds by the Shias. Even the members of the royalty preferred to be buried in the Imambaras and Karbalas constructed by them in their lifetime. That is why we do not come across many tombs of Nawabs of Avadh. Some of the nobles had their private graveyards too, some dead bodies were buried inside or in front of the houses also.[93]

On the third or fourth day of death, the Soyem ceremony was observed Passages were read from the Quran for the peace of the deceased. After recitations from the Quran and fatiha i.e prayer for the deceased, the following ritual was performed. In a sandal bowl was put some sweet smelling oil.[94] Flowers of bele and chameli were also kept nearby in leaf cups. Each of the relatives and others present then took one or two flowers and dropped them in the oil. The flowers were later placed on the grave. A majlis was also held on this occasion to console the family and to help the deceased to achieve nazat (deliverance).[95]

The Chehlum or the fortieth day ceremony was observed as the last important ritual which also marked the end of the mourning period. On this occasion too fatihas were offered and a majlis was held. In such majlises were distributed illaichi dana by the poor and khurme, shrimals or roti-salan by the rich. Besides a lavish feast was thrown and food was distributed among the poor Such food was cooked and distributed from the male apartments. It was never sent inside the mahalsera. An Aqbati jora (heavenly dress) was also given on this occasion to a maulvi or to a Kashmiri. In case of a deceased prince, along with this dress, an elephant was also given to the maulana who sold it rather cheap.[96]

A few words about the professional undertakers employed by the Shia Muslims. The Kashmiris were employed only by the upper classes. The same work was done by the Shuhde who acted in a most undignified manner if their wages were not handsome or to their satisfaction.[97] In case of death of a lady, it was a practice for her family to get a bangle of gold weighing one or two tolas made and put it on a finger of the deceased. This was later taken away by the bathers who were then expected to bathe the body gently and carefully.[98] The Kashmiris were also entitled to receive the bed on which the dead breathed his last, his clothes, the doshala covering the coffin as well as the heavenly dress on the fortieth day. In return the Kashmiris were expected to carry out all the rites from beginning to the ends.[99] The Shia royalty and nobility, it appears, were terribly afraid of death and as such they felt it safer to entrust the rites connected with the dead to the professionals.

Superstition, Taboos and Omens

There is undoubtedly an element of superstition and belief in omens in some of the Shia rituals and ceremonies already described besides the innovations introduced in religious practices. These aspects of Shia religious practices fitted in the general atmosphere of ignorance and superstitions then prevailing among the people, be they Hindu or Muslim. Writing about the Avadh of the first half of the eighteenth century, Srivastava observes that the people were sunk in ignorance and superstitions. High and low, Hindus and Muslims believed in omens, palmistry and astrology. Safdar Jung, for instance, would wait for hours for an auspicious moment for going on a journey or for starting on a campaign.[100]

When a son of Asafuddaulah was afflicted with small pox, he fed wet gram to a donkey as it was widely believed that it helped in curing the disease.[101] If hair of a witch was plucked and preserved, she lost her power to harm. If a person was taken ill, all of a sudden, and the physician was not able to diagnose the disease, it was presumed that the patient was visited by an evil spirit. To cure him, the maulvis prescribed a written prayer called taweez, a talisman or amulet which the people believed would not only protect the wearer from attacks of unclean spirits, genie etc. but will force these spirits to quit the afflicted person immediately on his using the amulet. The children were made to wear amulets since birth.[102]

The Shias were also great believers in Istikhara i.e. in ascertaining the will of God before taking a decision in an important matter, such as settlement of a marriage, property matters, going on a journey etc. Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali describes the procedure of Istikhara adopted to seek divine guidance in settlement of a marriage. A number of paper slips were taken. On half of number was written 'to be'. On the remaining half was inscribed 'not to be'. These were mixed together and placed under the prayer carpet. During the evening prayer, the head of the family would ask for help and guidance in the matter weighing on his head. He would recite a short prayer expressing his complete reliance on God and his perfect submission to his wise decree. Then praying, he drew a slip from under the prayer carpet. If the slip bore 'to be', the matter in hand would be settled. If it was 'not to be', it would be dropped forthwith.[103]

Moon appears to have played a very important role in the lives of Shia families. The full moon was considered propitious for marriages. No marriage was solemnize when the moon was in the unfavourable sign of Scorpio. It was believed that when the moon was in conjunction with the planet Venus, the time was most favourable for prayers and fulfilment of wishes. The maulvis wrote charms and talismans to be worn by children, all the time. If bleeding was prescribed as a remedy, it was not considered proper to bleed the patient when the moon was full or nearly full unless certain steps were taken to minimise the lunar influence. Similarly if bleeding was to be performed at the commencement of the second quarter or a few days after the moon was full, before bleeding a patient, a brand of straw was burnt and flourished above the sick-bed which was brought out in the moon's presence to deprecate the evil influence of the moon.[104]

Influence of moon was considered beneficial in case of diseases like nervous breakdown and palpitation of heart A silver basin filled with water, was held in such a manner that the full moon was refllected in the water. The patient was asked to look into the the basin steadfastly, then shut his eyes and drink the whole quantity of water at one draught. This was called drinking the moon.[105]

To commence on a journey, to build a house, to plant a tree, to take medicines, the age of the moon was taken into consideration and favourable signs in the moon's movements were sought.[106]

In respect of the phenomenon of Eclipse of Moon or Sun, the Hindu impact on Muslims in general and Shias in particular is evident from the narrative of Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali. Many attributed the phenomenon to the anger of God towards human beings. Others said that the moon was in debt. Most of the people felt a sensation of awe on occurrence of eclipse and spent their time in prayers. The ladies distributed corn, oil and money among the poor. A bride elect would send sudqah to her would-be groom along with a goat or kid to be tied to his bed-stead during the eclipse and to be given in charity later. During eclipse, expectant mothers were kept constantly awake for it was believed that the infant's security depended on her remaining wide awake. They were also forbidden to use needles, scissors, knives, infact any other instrument during eclipse for fear of drawing blood. A mixture of cowdung and drugs was rubbed on the bellies of expecting animals, cows, sheep, goats etc.[107]

No wonder Najoomies (astrologers) were greatly in demand. Najoomies were attached to the darbars of King and the nobles. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali was amazed at the influence which these najoomies exercised over their patrons. If the Najoomie said that it was not proper for the Nawab sabeb or his begum to eat, to drink, to sleep, to take medicines, to go from home, to give away or to accept a gift or any other action, which the human reason is the best guide to decide upon, then the proposed action would have to be dropped or deferred. The Najoomie could make peace or war in the family. In fact the nobility was completely under his thumb.[108]

We have many interesting stories and incidents to show that the successors of Safdar Jung shared the prejudices and superstitions of their ancestor. Naurozi Begum, a mughlani of Qudsia Begum, wife of Nasiruddin Haider, was arrested for illegally amassing twenty lacs of rupees. The King's courtiers conspired with her to get her set free if she gave them five lacs of rupees. They persuaded the King to be contented with her externment from his kingdom because she was a sorceress who could take his soul to the Other World to keep company with Qudsia Begum who had died recently. The King was frightened and accepted the suggestion. The lady was therefore, sent to Kanpur in the British territory without realising the ill gotten money from her. The courtiers got five lacs of rupees in the bargain.[109] According to Knighton, use of the word 'death' or its equivalents were banned in the household of Malka Kishwar, wife of Amjad Ali Shah. The idea was conveyed only through equivocal expressions such as 'the responsibility of the wife was off the husband's shoulders', to convey that the wife was dead.[110] The kings were so much afraid of death that they usually abandoned the palace lived by their immediate predecessor.[111] Malka Kishwar did not like to move about in the corridors or passages after dark and always had a bright light in her own room, for more than once, she heard shrieks from the walls of the palace begging water, food and light. It was believed that the shrieks came from women walled up for infidelity or other crimes under King's orders.[112]

When Wajid Ali Shah became King of Avadh, he only touched the gaddi of his forefathers seven times and did not sit on it as his predecessors had done because he had heard a rumour that a snake lay hidden in the throne and that its poison would end his life.[113]

Wajid Ali Shah was warned to stay away from one of his waiting maid servants who had infatuated him because she had a sampun (the figure of a snake) on back of her neck and if he slept with her, he and his children would perish. The King got so frightened that he got the backs of necks of all of his wives except Nawab Khas Mahal, inspected by his eunuch, Bashir. Eight of them were found to have this mark and were divorced forth-with. Later the Brahmans suggested that if the head of the snake was singered with a hot iron, the evil could be checked. Only two of the wives consented to undergo this treatment and to remain with the king.[114]

Wajid Ali Shah abolished the office of crown prince when three princes nominated as such, died in quick succession considering this office itself ill omened.[115]

Then we have the interesting episode of King Jin, which had its beginning in the days of Amjad Ali Shah but had its climax and culmination during the reign of Wajid Ali Shah. Towards the end of Amjad Ali Shah's period, Raziuddaulah Qutbuddaulah who was a brother of a women named Amman titled Suroor Jahan by the king who was fond of her, became a power to reckon with. In order to contain him and bring him down in King's estimation, the Vizier, Nawab Imdad Husain entered into a conspiracy with a courtesan, Ashfaqul Sultan, who bore enmity with Raziuddaulah. The supernatural power of this King of Jins were conveyed to Amjad Ali Shah through an old lady popularly known as Ustani in who mthe King had great faith. The imposter who used to gather information about the King and palace beforehand, would reveal them to the King in his own way. The King was highly impressed but before any advantage could be taken, Amjad Ali Shah died suddenly. In the day of Wajid Ali Shah, Raziuddaulah Qutubuddaulah who had by then, learnt the reality of the King of Jins, decided to use him to serve his own end. A house was specially remodelled, renovated and fitted with many passages and exits. In a supernatural aura, a meeting was arranged between the King and Jin. The King was completely won over. The Jin began to get orders issued in favonr of his mentors and against their enemies. Finally, it was Ashfaqul Sultan referred to above, who exploded this myth as a result of which Raziuddaulah Qutubudaulah along with his family and conspirators was put in goal.[116]

Even during the post Nawabi period, we find that the nobility, gentry and common folk alike had blind faith in superstitions, Jins, churails and the like. They were befooled by amils, sadhus and jugglers. People had a large fund of stories connected with Jins, evil spirits and fairies which were readily believed.[117] The dastans written in this period are full of stories of Jins, fairies, spirits and the like.

When a person had an attack of small pox, Hindu malis were called to offer puja and donkeys were fed with gram at cross-roads.[118] If a comet was seen on the sky, it was considered a bad omen which might cause wars between kings and lead to wide-spread damage and destruction.[119]

The women especially those belonging to the nobility, were highly superstitious. The servants were warned not to utter words like the corpse, funeral, coffin or even to sneeze on happy occasions. The girls were not allowed to bare their heads while putting on new glass bangles. However, unlike the Nawabi days, there were many who questioned this blind faith and superstitious beliefs and tried to expose the tricksters.[120]

In short, the Shia religious ceremonies, rituals and common beliefs as nurtured and developed in the Nawabi period and under the feudal system in the early post Nawabi period, found general acceptance from almost all sections of Lucknow's population irrespective of caste and creed because they eminently fitted in the socio-cultural setting of Avadh.[121]

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5

LAKHNAU SCHOOL

To claim mastery over language before people of Lucknow
Is to talk of musk—scent before musk—deer

—Amir Minai

Even today, men of letters in Urdu literature talk of Delhi and Lucknow Schools of Literature, thus emphasizing and distinguishing the literary attainments of Nawabi rule in Lucknow from those of the Mughal rule in Delhi. In fact, the rivalry between the two schools has led to hot but lively and interesting controversy between the exponents of the two schools and researches on distinguishing features, contributions and attainments of the two schools, have been continually conducted with a view to establishing supremacy of one over the other. In his well documented work, Ali Jawwad Zaidi has, however, exploded the concept of two schools by showing that the so called distinguishing features were really common, in lesser or greater measure, to both the schools.[1]

As a matter of fact, initially the so-called Lucknow school was mainly manned by men of letters from Delhi. Before Nawabi rule, Lucknow, had no literary tradition in Urdu prose or poetry. However, as we have already shown, thanks to the Ulema of Firangi Mahal, Lucknow had attained the reputation of being a prestigious centre of Islamic studies and Arabic scholarsihp from the days of Aurangzeb who made a gift of the houses of Firangi Mahal to the scholarly Mulla Nizamuddin Sehalvi. In a short time, his descendants developed Lucknow as an International school of Islamic learning.[2]

Urdu Poetry

In Urdu literature, poetry has existed for a much longer period than prose which made its debut much later. Although, Urdu poetry was born in the Deccan, it grew and flourished in Delhi under the patronage of the later Mughals. With the decline of their political power, the later mughals also lost their sources of income and soon spent up whatever wealth they had stored. It is no surprise that they found themselves unable to patronize fine arts and maintain poets and courtesans who were by tradition mainly dependant on them for their succour. In his famous poem "Shahr Ashob", Sauda (1713-1780) has portrayed the pitiable condition of Delhi, its people, soldiers, buildings and atmosphere. Sample the following :

The foot soldiers, yes but they dread
shaving by barbers
The horse soldiers, yes but they will fall
from their cots while asleep
If they dreamt their horses
gambolling playfully
There is no house where jackals don't howl.
If one goes to a mosque for
evening prayers
He'll find no lamp except lamp of darkness
Jahanabad didn't deserve this cruel fate.
This town was the heart of a lover
a shot while ago
But it was rubbed off like a
false mark.
It was a unique shore of the World Ocean
Where people would pick pearls
from its dust.

While Delhi was stricken with squalor and poverty, states built on debris of the Mughal Empire, were rolling in wealth and affluence. To boost up their newly acquired status, they began patronizing art and culture treading the path which their erstwhile or nominal rulers of Delhi had all along followed. Among them were Muslim states of Avadh, Rohilkhand, Farrukhabad, Murshidabad, Haiderabad and Arcot. There Urdu poets were warmly welcomed.

Despite their strait circumstances, the poets of Delhi at first resisted to leave their 'Jahanabad' notwithstanding lucrative offers from states. Sauda, for instance, spurned the invitation of Nawab Shujauddaulah to come to Faizabad. However, in face of starvation and bleak prospects ahead, many of them changed their minds and decided to bid adieu to Delhi. Avadh soon became a favourite with them because of its nearness to Delhi, Nawab's repeated invitations and tempting inducements. Mir Sirajuddin Khan Arzoo, was the first major poet of Delhi who along with his group of poets, came to Faizabad in the court of Shujaudaulah in or about 1754 A.D. He however, died only two years later in 1756 A.D. and was burried in Delhi in accordance with his wish.[3] Sauda too overcame his reluctance and migrated to Faizabad in 1771. Sauda moved to Lucknow when Asafuddaulah shifted his headquarters there. He was treated well by

Asaf-ud-daulab who gave him an annual allowance of Rs. 6,000 besides frequent rewards in cash and kind. He died in 1781. Later Lucknow poets were influenced by his hijo and qasida but they failed to rise to his heights.[4] Meer Taqui Meer, yet another noted poet of Delhi, whose birth place was however, Agra, came to Lucknow in 1784 on the invitation of Asafuddaulah and died in 1810 during the reign of Nawab Sadat Ali Khan. Despite the recognition Meer received in Lucknow, he could not reconcile himself to Lucknow's life-style.[5] He blurred out :

Ten times better than Lucknow was Delhi's devastation
I wish I had died there and had not come here in desperation.

These doyens of Delhi School were followed by Meer Hasan, Meer Mustahsin Khaleeq, Mir Qamruddin Minnat, Mirza Jafar Ali Hasrat, Meer Haider Ali Hairan, Ashraf Ali Khan Fughan, Qalander Bux Jurat, Meer Insha Ullah Khan Insha, Meer Zia-uddin Zia, Ghulam Hamdani Musahfi, Saadat Yar Rangin and Nasim Dehlavi.[6] Among them Meer Hasan, Zia, Insha, Juraat, Musahfi and Rangin made their debut in Lucknow and are known to day mainly for their poetry produced in Lucknow. However, all of them could not succeed as poets in Lucknow. Some of them left Lucknow for better prospects and tried their luck in other Courts and at the East India Company at Calcutta. Among this category were Minnat, Fughan and Zia.

While on Delhi poets, it seems germane to mention Mirza Sulaiman Shikah, one of Shah Alam's sons who came to Lucknow in 1790, adopted Shia faith and settled there permanently. He was himself a poet and a pupil of a Delhi poet Shah Hatim. In Lucknow, he consulted Mohib and later Musahfi. He used to hold his own darbar and patronized poets.[7] He tried to maintain the tradition of Delhi in Lucknow. Besides Musahfi, Insha and Juraat too were initially attached to his Court. It was however, a short lived affair as fortune of the prince quickly dwindled in which Nasiruddin Haider played no mean part.

There is, therefore, no gain-saying the fact that the foundations of Urdu poetry in Avadh were laid by poets of Delhi led by Shiraj Uddin Khan Arzoo and his pupils. It may be recalled that it was the Courtesans of Delhi who built up the hierarchy of professional women in Lucknow. No wonder, the Nawabs of Lucknow considered it prestigious to adorn their darbar with everything made in Delhi.

Imam Buksh, 'Nasikh' (died 1838 A.D.) is rated to be the first major non-Delhi poet of Avadh and is stated to have played a prominent role in promoting what later came to be known as Lucknow School. Born in a humble family of Faizabad Nasikh first tried his luck in the darbar of a Faizabad noble, Nawab Meer Mohammad Taqui Khan and later went to Lucknow and secured the patronage of Meer Kazim Ali from whom he inherited some property also. It was at Lucknow that he perfected his education and developed himself into a promising poet of ghazals.[8] He, however, got involved in the intrigues of Avadh nobility. To please his mentor, Nawab Maatmud-daulah, he wrote a hijo against Nawab Hakim Mehdi in 1819 during the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider and was suitably rewarded for this. During the rule of Nasiruddin Haider, Hakim Mehdi was appointed Prime Minister in 1830 and Nasikh had to leave Lucknow. Nasikh returned to Lucknow in 1832 when Hakim Mehdi was dismissed. The Hakim was, however, called back again in 1837, when Mohammad Ali Shah was ruling, Nasikh fled from Lucknow once more but again returned after a few months as Hakim Mehdi had died in December 1837. While at last he was looking forward to live a peaceful life, Nasikh himself breathed his last shortly afterwards in 1839. Thus came to an end this cat and mouse story.[9]

Nasikh had a big following and a large number of pupils. Prominent among them were Khwaja Wazir (died 1851 A.D.), Mirza Mohammad Raza Khan Burq (died 1857 A.D.), Ali Ausat Rashq (died 1867), Mirza Hatim Ali Beg, Mehr (died 1879), Syed Mohammad Ismail Husain, Munir Shikohabadi (1813-1881), Sheikh Imdad Ali Bahr (1810-1872) and Jalal Lakhnavi (1837-1909).

Nasikh and Atish along with their followers form two separate sub-schools of the Lucknow School of poetry. Like Nasikh, Atish too was born in Faizabad (in or around 1778) and got a job with Nawab Meer Mohammad Iaqui Khan. He came to seek his fortune in Lucknow in or around 1805 and became a shagird of Musahfi.[10] Like Nasikh he too attained fame as a poet of ghazals in Lucknow. Unlike Nasikh however, Atish lived a quiet, secluded and politically uneventful life. As both of these poets were contemporaries for a long time and both had a set of devoted pupils and ardent followers in accordance with the traditions of poets in those days, they indulged in poetic rivalries and encounters especially in Mushairas which thus became lively and attracted large audiences. In these Mushairas, each side not only indulged in self praise and extolled the poetry of their respective masters but openly condemned and deprecated the other side and ridiculed the kalam of the rivals. While the pupils sometimes crossed the limits of decency, the two masters, on the whole, maintained a dignified attitude towards each other. The following two couplets are produced to give an inkling of poetic attacks and counter attacks by the two camps.

Nasikh said :

An illiterate is replying to my diwan
Abu Muslim too had produced a reply to the Quran

Pat came this poetic reply from Atish

Why should not every believer reply to this
infidel's diwan
As he claims his diwan to be a reply of the Quran.

Although Atish died in 1867, he continues to live in the hearts of thousands of lovers of Urdu verse. Among the pupils of Atish who have left a permanent imprint on the canvas of Urdu poetry, are Pandit Daya Shankar 'Naseem' (1812-1844), Nawab Mirza Shauq (1783-1871), Nawab Syed Mohammad Khan Rind (1797-1857), and Meer Wazir Ali 'Saba' (1795-1854).

Prominent pupils of Nasikh and Atish had their own shagirds who kept the names of their masters alive. Important among them were Jalal (shagird of Barq), Munir and Mohsin Kakorvi (shagirds of Bashq) and Qalq (shagird of Wazir), who were incidentally the last poets of Nasikh School. The chain of Atish School of poets was still shorter. The only important poet of this class worth mentioning was Akbar Allahabadi (shagird of Wahid).[11]

Muzaffar Ali Khan Asir (1800-1881) was yet another important poet. He toed the Musahfi line. His pupils have however, formed a longer chain than those of Nasikh or Atish. Among them was Amir Minai (1826-1900) who was guiding light of poets like Hafij Jalil, Reyaz Khairabadi, Akhtar Minai, Muzaffar Khairabadi, Benazir Shah Warsi and Dil Shah Jehanpuri.[12]

Musahfi should also be treated as the founding father of Marsiya writing in Lucknow. Among his pupils who specialised in marsiya writing were Meer Khaleeq and Mir Muzaffar Husain Zamir. Dilgir a contemporary of Zamir and a pupil of Nasikh who was either a Hindu or a converted Shia, was yet another important marsiya poet.

Marsiya writing and recitation attained new heights when Meer Babar Ali Anis (1802-1874) and Mirza Salamat Ali Dabir (1803-1875) made their debut. They constituted two distinct schools and almost the whole Shia population of Lucknow was divided into Anisiye (Anisites) and Dabiriye (Dabirites) leading to interesting rivalries, poetic encounters and contests reminiscent of the days of Nasikh and Atish. The traditions of Meer Anis were kept up by his younger brother, Moonis (died 1875), his son, Uns (died 1884), Nafees (died 1900) and many others. But Dabiriya chain of poets ended shortly after Dabir's death as his style of writing lost its appeal.[13]

Before we close the list of Lucknow poets, it is neccessary to make a passing reference to the poetry of Avadh rulers. We have shown how Lucknow tried to follow Delhi in various fields of art and culture. Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal Emperor whose takhallus was Zafar, was a refined poet in his own right and he made versification respectable for the ruling classes and the nobility. No wonder, rulers of splinter states like Rampur, Farrukhabad and Avadh also indulged in composing verse. Asafuddaulah wrote ghazals and his Ustad was Meer Soz. Here is a couplet from one of his ghazals :

Where we see his sword aloft
There we find our heads rolled down

Wazir Ali who was deposed by the British after a short rule, wrote a large number of verses, sad and pathetic. It is said that Saadat Ali Khan too composed verses but his writings are not available.[14] Ghaziuddin Haider composed marsiya and manqabat but their quality is poor. His son, Nasiruddin Haider wrote qasida and ghazal. Here are two lines from one of his ghazals.

Since my eyes have contained you
Wherever I see, I see you, you alone.

We do not come across any verse composed by Mohammad Ali Shah and Amjad Ali Shah. In fact, the latter, an strict follower of Shia shariat, stopped patronising poets. The last king of Avadh, Wajid Ali Shah was, however, not only a lover of poetry, music and fine arts but has left behind a large anthology of his verses. He wrote profusely and tried his hand on all types of poetry—ghazal, masnavi, hijo, marsiya, nauha and salam. In Masnavi Huzne Akhtar—Akhtar was his takhallus—he has described his personal life, lives of his Begums, their indifference towards him and intrigues as well as his confinement in Fort Williams, Calcutta. Wajid Ali Shah's verses are of considerable value in the study of the culture and social life of those days.

Special features

This is, in short, the history of development of Urdu poetry during the Nawabi days. Let us now examine the special features and prominent characteristics of Urdu poetry of this period.

However, before we attempt this, let us hurriedly recapitulate the situation in Delhi and have a look over the netting in Lucknow.

At that time, the Mughals had lost their Empire. Their writ did not run beyond the four corners of the Fort. Their source of income or subsistence was a pension from the British. The nobility was in disarray and financially bankrupt. In short, the Emperor, the nobility and the people were passing through an unprecedented wave of poverty, frustration and hopelessness. This had its impact and imprinton the poetry of Delhi in those days. The atmosphere in Lucknow was however, entirely different, in fact diametrically opposite. In Lucknow had begun a new dynastic rule which spread over a fertile and rich tract yielding considerable revenue. Even when the British assumed supremacy in Avadh, they allowed the internal and revenue administration to remain in the hands of the Nawabs who were able to ensure a regular flow of revenue from the rural areas to Lucknow with the result, that the royal household and nobility rolled in affluence. The earlier Nawabs who had served the Delhi Darbar, were keen to encourage poets and courtesans in keeping with the Delhi tradition. When Ghaziuddin Haider threw away even the notional yoke of Delhi by declaring himself a king, the Avadh rulers not only made efforts to rival Delhi but also to humiliate their erstwhile masters. The result : The poets were not only received with open arms by the Nawabs and the nobles but they were also well provided for. Thus unlike poets of Delhi, most of the Lucknow poets had no problems of bread and butter. Ironically, the presence of the British in Lucknow, instead of unsettling things as it had done in Delhi, proved to be a firm guarantee against political instability in Avadh. The result was that Lucknow presented a picture of stability, peace, affluence and merriment. No wonder, these aspects influenced the poets of Lucknow, Delhi migrants partially and later poets greatly, in shaping their ideas, thoughts and imagination. Again, Shiism, the religion of the rulers of Avadh, with its accent on eulogy of Hazrat Ali and his descendants and elegy on the tragedy of Karbala, was bound to influence the poets and leave its imprint on the poetry of those days.

Keeping in view, the above observations, let us examine the contribution of Lucknow school to some important forms of Urdu verse.

Ghazal has been by far the most popular form of poetry in Urdu. It was especially encouraged by the royalty and nobility because of its romantic and sensual contents. Although 'ghazal' literally meant "talking to women", in actual practice, Urdu poets, maintaining the tradition of Iranian poets, believed in 'talking' to beautiful boys and not women in their ghazals. Because of Iranian influence and to a certain extent, an account of Sufiism, the Delhi society not only tolerated homosexuality but it became fashionable for nobles, artists and poets too have boys as their keeps in actual life. In ghazals, the object of attention was always the male. It was considered disreputable to express love to a lady in ghazals. The apologists of this tradition give two main reasons for resorting to masculine gender for their object of love. According to the first, as the women led a secluded life in purdah, it was not considered descent to talk about affairs with women publicly. The second ground—which is obviously a sufi argument—is that the male gender in Urdu ghazals is applicable, both to God and His comely creature and thus the poet's expression can be attributed to divine love (ishaq-e-haqiqi) or earthly love (ishaq-e-majazi) depending on the reader's taste or poet's reputation.

The Lucknow poets, however, pulled down the ghazal from its starring heights to earth and instead of incorporating imaginary affairs, they gave expression to their sentiments for women who existed in real life in bone and flesh. Such women came from both the categories i.e. the purdah nashin ladies and the courtesans, although they largely concentrated on the latter to save the former from public gaze. It is no surprise that Lucknow poets thought it fit to go into details of dress, ornaments, decorations and even toilet of their ladies love. It is no use to raise eyebrows, if some of them go further and describe even intimate moment called maamlabandi in their parlance in spicy details. However, they continued to follow the traditionalists in using masculine gender for their love and this is perhaps the oddest thing about the ghazals of Lucknow poets.

Here are a few couplets by way of illustration :

(1)

When I kissed 'him' perforce
in the night of love

Very much he quarrelled, raged,
shook and stamped about.

(2)

When we met, I made a hint
Evasively he said

It's day yet, wait for the night

(*Insha*)

(3)

Leave me alone, let me go, lest I'am disgraced
on the road.
See there is no privacy, don't suck my lips.
(*Insha*)

(4)

After ages, we've got a chance to meet,
Now my heart says let's do 'that' thing
(*Rangin*)

(5)

Said he' I'll go home, said I
'Keep quiet, no more excuses to-day':
(*Rangin*)

(6)

If ever they got their bras fastened by me
I'll show these beauties how their breasts swell
(*Jalal*)

(7)

Don't bother about my moods
Somebody else would comfort me
(*Rind*)

(8)

Do not wear dupatta in two folds
What you gain by hiding visible things?

Masnavi, another form of poetry which is a long narrative poem based on love and other themes, was the field which attracted Lucknow poets who made a significant contribution. The Iranians, it may be mentioned, had, specialized in writing masnavis. Firdaus' is famous Shahnama is actually a martial masnavi. The earlier masnavis were therefore, translated from Persian, especially in the Deccan which can also take credit to produce the first Urdu masnavi, Qulb Mushtari, in 1609 A.D.[15] Lucknow, however, seems to have developed expertise to produce masnavis on love themes. As a matter of fact, Masnavi writing was so popular during the Nawabi days that most of the important poets wrote masnavis also. The well-known masnavis of Lucknow are Sahr-ul-Bayan and Gulzare-Aram by Meer Hasan, Gulzare-i-Nasim by Daya Shanker Nasim, Tilism-e-ulfat by Aftab Ud-Daula Qalaq and Bahare-Ishaq, Zahre-e-Ishq and Fareb-e-Ishq by Nawab Mirza Shauq besides Huzne Akhtar and Dariya-e-Taashuq by Wajid Ali Shah.

The masnavis throw a flood of light on the social and cultural life and values of those days. We get a vivid picture of the spoken language of both begums, common women and courtesans as well as their dress, ornaments and toilet. We also find the natural use of genders i.e. a woman is openly 'she' and not 'he' as in ghazals. Shauq especially portrayed the amorous adventures of the ladies of nobility and respectable families for which he has been universally condemned by Lucknowites. About his masnavi, Zahr-e-Ishq, it is said that once a theatrical company staged it as a play at Lucknow. On seeing it, a girl committed suicide as a result of which the Government of India banned the masnavi having found it obscene. Let us find out what it was all about. The story of Zahr-e-Ishq begins with the lines.

In the mohalla where our house was located
There used to live a trader.

Now this trader who was highly respected and possessed a large wealth, had a daughter.

He had a daughter with a moon like forehead
She had not been married yet
She had no parallel in beauty
She humbled houris actually.

The narrative is in the first person. It is suspected and widely believed that the poet, Mirza Shauq, has told his own adventure. The poet and the girl happen to see each other from the roofs of their houses and Shauq falls in love instantly. The girl responds. There is exchange of letters and then :

She stayed overnight in my house
Saying this she left in morn
My soul, I go now
'Keep remembering company I gave'

To cut the story short, her people became aware of her goings on and decide to send her to Benaras (Varanasi). She meets Shauq at the dargah of Hazrat Abbas, the usual meeting place of lovers during those days and informs him of these developments and of her intention to take poison.

If I end my life by taking poison
Don't weep, I make you swear by my head.

She warns him that he should not mourn her openly lest people should come to know of their love affair which would result in the humiliation of her family.

If you become mad with grief
My humiliation would spread far and wide
You may have to face thousand calamities
But, please, protect my honour.

And just before she takes leave finally, she utters the following pathetic words.

To make you remember this much
Let me prepare plans for tomorrow.

Shauq expresses his profound love and sorrow but takes no concrete steps to dissuade her from ending her life. She is as good as her words. Her death brings grief and sorrow for Shauq and finally he too takes poison to end his life but recovers after remaining unconscious for three days in which state, the beloved appears and rebukes him.[16]

Listen, why did you take poison?
You didn't care to honour my will.

No wonder, love masnavis, being in tune with the atmosphere of affluence, carefreeness and tolerance of sex laxities, became hot favourites with poets and people of Lucknow.

Vasokht is another form of poetry for which the soil of Lucknow proved fertile. According to Sharar,[17] Vasokht consists of six line verses in which the lover first proclaims his love for his beloved and then complains of 'his' infidelities. To win 'him' back, he projects an imaginary beloved in order to tease, torment and to make the real beloved jealous so as to attain ultimate reconciliation with 'him'.

To give the reader an idea of Vasokht, let us have a hurried look at the Vasokht written by Nawab Mirza Shauq.[18] In his Vasokht consisting of forty-one, six line verses, Shauq recalls the day when his loved one was simple and unaware of the ways of the world. 'He' was so shy that :

When strings of the bra were unfastened 'he' used
to feel shy
He would retain the bra by pressing ends
under the armpits
He would swear 'Let the wretched one see my dead body'
'He who saw me naked, be blinded'.

Then he developed friendship with others and became smart and clever. He started attracting attention and became intimate with a large number of people forgetting that it was because of the poet that he had won admiration of the people. The poet therefore cautions him.

Don't pride in you two-day beauty, oh statue
If you are lovely, your slave is no less!
Hundreds die in their desire to talk to me
Hundreds are keen to meet me.

Then he again requests the beloved to reconsider the whole situation, give up others and return to the poet. If he still does not relent, the poet does not forget to give him a parting kick.

Who wants to meet him now?
Let my shoes talk to such a selfish one.

I have also before me Vasokhts written by Sheikh Mohammad Husain 'Malal' and Lala Babsidhar 'Himmat'.

Rekhti is yet another field specially chosen by Lucknow poets to run riot with their imagination.

In the Rekhti form of Urdu poetry, the poet used feminine phraseology to give expression to supposed sentiments of the fair sex on various aspects of male-female relationship.

Rekhti, however, did not originate in Lucknow. Hashmi Burhanpuri is said to be the first poet to have written verses in feminine language. The word Rekhti was coined by Amir Khan Anjam who was a poet and noble in the reign of Mohammad Shah Rangeley.[19] In the period of Shah Alam, Raja Ram Pandit Bahadur used to compose Rekhtis. However, it was Saadat Yar Khan Rangin, a poet of Delhi who later migrated to Lucknow during the rule of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, who was rated as the first major Rekhti poet.

Lucknow proved to be a fertile ground for Rangin and Rekhti both. Insha Ullahah Khan Insha, a contemporary of Rangin, too fell in line and started writing Rekhti. Later on, Jan Saheb, yet another poet of Lucknow, tried his pen on Rekhti successfully. These poets have produced a heap of verses most of which are of doubtful literary value but nevertheless they vividly portray the morality and social attitudes of the last days of Muslim rule in India.

The women coming within the ambit of Rekhti were usually courtesans and women of the so-called lowly classes who, under the feudal system then prevailing, could be easily purchased and possessed. Rekhti is considered to be the vehicle of expression of feelings of the women of these classes. However, it would not be quite correct to say that the Rekhti presented the genuine sentiments of these women. As a mater of fact, in Rekhti, the poets have depicted what pleasure seeking men expected these women to say in intimate moments in order to excite lustful feelings. The fact that we do not come across any poetess of Rekhti undoubtedly shows that most women considered Rekhti derogatory and offensive to their taste. The main claim of Rekhti not to be ignored and consigned to oblivion, lies in its rich and authentic store of words and phrases used by courtesans and similar classes of bye gone days although, here and there are also to be found instances of language of decent ladies.

Here are a few examples of Rehkti :

(1)

We'n coyly she screened herself with the pillow
She got hurt with the pillow.

(*Insha*)

(2)

Naznin, don't employ this youthful slave girl
Your hubby will entice her way.

(*Naznin*)

(3)

A pros you kept a boy friend I too
would have found
But to bring disgrace to the family, I did not want

(*Naznin*)

(4)

Oh Jan, he pressed me so hard to
his chest
That ornamentation on my bra were badly
crushed

(*Jan Saheb*)

(5)

She has tasted twenty dishes
How can she be stationary ?

(*Jan Saheb*)

(6)

Bleeding are my thighs, O' Insha
Look, I'am going to scream, if you pinch again.

(*Insha*)

(7)

When I bit his thigh yesterday
He enjoyed biting my tongue.

(*Insha*)

It would be thus seen that the main object of Rekhti was to provide perverse pleasure by eaves-dropping on zenana conversation. The poets were Peeping Toms who used the eyes of their imagination to pry into bedrooms, female quarters, dancing halls and gossip parlours. The whole business of Rekhti was most nauseating, degrading and humiliating to womanhood. It is no surprise that it ceased to be popular with the decay of the Nawabi rule.

Elegy writing is one form of poetry in which Lucknow has left all other cities such as Delhi, Hyderabad, Rampur and Murshidabad far behind. Elegy poets of Lucknow are heads and shoulders high over poets from other places. True, it is acknowledged that growth of elegy writing in Lucknow owes itself to the open, generous and substained patronage extended by Shia rulers of Avadh but money and motivation alone do not and cannot lead to creative poetry. It was a pure and welcome coincidence that genuses like Anis and Dabir were born in a period when elegy writing was also being patronzed by the State. In the ultimate analysis of things, it would be found that perfection in elegy writing attained by Lucknow, was more due to Anis and Dabir rather than to Avadh darbar.

As is well known, the elegies of Lucknow, centre round the series of tragic incidents connected with martyrdom of Imam Husain. The three forms of elegies developed in Urdu are marsiyas, salams and nauhas. Marsiya derived from 'rasi' which denotes mourning the dead and stating his virtues, is like a masnavi, a long narrative poem describing tragic events.[20] Salams and nauhas are shorter poems on the same subject with the difference that these can be recited in rhythm. It is said that first marsiyas were written during the reign of Tahmasp Safavi of Iran, foremost among them being the seven stanza marsiyas of Muhtashim Kashi (died 1588 A.D.) In India earliest marsiyas were written in the Deccan by Mulla Wajahi and his two compositions Qulb Mushtari (1609 A.D.) and Sub Ras (1635 A.D.) are well known. In North India we come across the earliest marsiyas in the book 'Dah Majlis' written by Fazli in 1732. Among the Delhi marsiya writers, names of Sauda, Gada, Miskin and Afsurda can be cited.[21]

It goes to the credit of Lucknow to make marsiya writing respectable among the poets. The marsiyas of Anis and Dabir as well as their pupils rank high as works of poetry. These not only describe the incidents of Karbala vividly and pathetically with a genuine feeling and emotional involvement of the poet but also deal with landscape, natural sceneries and weather condition at Karbala as well as emotions, sentiments, valour and character of Imam Husain and his party. While conceding that some of the rituals, sentiments and scenes depicted are not at all authentic, being more Indian than Arabian but then they catch the imagination of the listeners and in any case are beautiful pieces of verse not easily available in the ghazal ridden language of Urdu.

Ali Akbar, the youthful son of Husain, who is dying after a fierce battle with the enemy, tells his father, he is not weeping because he is going to die.

The admirers who had come with you, are gone faraway
I weep because you are now alone

(*Anis*)

When Husain asks his sister, Zainab to have patience, she tells him :

Except you, I have none to care for me, my brother
I am a human being, my liver is no stone my brother
I have never seen a battle thus fought
I've never known a full family ruined in one day.

(*Anis*)

When Husain is mortally wounded in the battle field, Dabir describes the agony of his sister Zainab.

When her sons died, she didn't come out but now she has
Cover your faces for Zainab has come out.

Another offshoot of Shia impact on Lucknow's Urdu poetry, was development of harsiya writing i.e. a form of hazal, in which the enemies of the Prophet's household were ridiculed. As the Shias included the first three Khalifas of Islam too among the enemies, such poetry was all along resented by the members of the Sunni sect. As a result, most of the harsiya poetry is underground and unpublished. Even during the Nawabi days it was recited in exclusive and private gatherings. Foremost among the harsiya writers was Mian Mushir, a shagird of Dabir. He was a permanent invitee to an annual sitting which was held on the last Sunday of Rabiulauval every year in mohalla Pir Bukhara during the nawabi days. The sitting was discontinued in 1857 but started again six years later.[22] I have before me two harsiyas written by Mian Mushir under the titles 'Bartender', I love Drinking from the start' and 'To-day I'm penniless, give me Wine on credit, O' Bartender'. The contents show that the poet has ridiculed one or the other of the first three Caliphs as well as the Sunni community. The harsiyas were written in lighter vein and were for the consumption of only select Shia gatherings. It has been prudent on the part of publishers and authors that they have not published most of the harsiyas.

It may be mentioned that harsiyas alone were not chosen for underground recital. The nobility used to hold underground mushairas behind closed doors in which vulgar and obscene verses which were otherwise unprintable, were freely recited.[23] Chirkin, Jan Saheb and Sahib Qaran are some of the poets who had mastered the art of writing such verses.[24]

While on Shia influence, it may be germane to mention that for Avadh poets, whatever be their faith, it became customary to write munqabat i.e. praise of the Fourteen Sinless or the Sacred Five besides the time honoured 'hamd' (Praise of God) and 'naat' (Praise of the Prophet), at the beginning of their work. For instance, Daya Shanker Nasim begins his famous masnavi Gulzar-e-Nasim with praise of God, the Prophet and then the Sacred Five.

The five fingers are pointers
That all obey the Sacred Five.

The story of Lucknow's contribution to Urdu poetry would not be complete if we omit to describe versified dramas written and staged at Lucknow and elsewhere. In this connection, it is necessary to refer to the theatrical performance of rahas based on Krishna-gopi themes staged by Wajid Ali Shah in his Kaiserbagh Palace. The ruler himself played the role of Krishna and his paris acted as Radha and gopies.[25] Some of the verses used in the drama were composed by Wajid Ali Shah himself.[26]

The credit for writing the first versified drama, i.e. natak, goes to Amanat Lakhnavi, a contemporary of Wajid Ali Shah. Amanat composed his famous Indra Sabha in 1848[27] which became immediately popular. The story of Indra Sabha revolves round Indra, the King of Fairies. One of his fairies, Sabzpari (Green Fairy) falls in love with a human being, a prince named Gulfam. Secretly she shows him the darbar of Raja Indra. Playing the part of a villain, Lal Deo (Red Demon) reveals this to Indra. The result : The prince is put under arrest and the fairy is banished from the Fairy-land. She becomes a jogin, a mendicant who goes about singing devotional songs. She manages to get entry into the darbar of Raja Indra who, pleased with her melodious songs and not knowing her real identity, offers to give her a reward of her choice. She demands the release of Gulfam. Gulfam is then set free and the Indra Sabha ends with this happy note.[28]

While some portions of Indra Sabha may depict the darbar and portrait of Wajid Ali Shah, it has to be kept in view that Amanat was not a poet of the darbar of Wajid Ali Shah. The work was basically meant for the people at large. Amanat has therefore heavily drawn from popular forms of ragas and folk poetry, for instance thumris, chaubola, chhand, holi, savana, and basant.[29] Production of Indra Sabha from purely indigenous material without any reference to Arabic or Persian language, speaks volumes of the originality and guts of the author who chose to write something which was not considered quite respectable then. In due course, however, it won acclaim and the shows based on Indra Sabha, became popular among the nobility also. A number of other Sabhas were composed later. Foremost writer of Sabha among them was Madarilal.

Verse-making in Lucknow was not the monopoly of the recognized poets only. Urdu was not confined to the palace as was in Delhi. It had become people's language in Lucknow. From the king to his lowliest subject, whether, literate or illiterate, every one tried his hand at poetry. We have described elsewhere that a number of courtesans were poetesses in their own right. One of Insha's slave girls, Chameli with Yasmin as her takhallus, was a poetess. Here are two lines from one of her ghazals.[30]

The houris would fall in my estimation
If I'd remember thee in Heaven.

To distinguish it from sophisticated poetry, the poetry of the illiterate was called Tukbandi i.e. rhyme forming. A large number of people from all walks of life, were tukbands (poetesters). Many were capable of composing verses at the spur of the moment. These extempore poets were in great demand. No wonder, mushairas were not confined to the elite only. Mushairas were held at market-places, fairs, infact wherever people gathered. Even the opium addicts used to hold their separate mushairas in fairs and gatherings. In the Athon Ka Mela held at the Tikait Rai Ka Talab, mushairas were held. Although, the high ranking poets themselves did not participate, their shagirds recited their kalam. We have, however, evidence that Insha attended some of these mushairas, Ghazals were also sold in such fairs and mushairas.[31]

Mirza Jaffar Husain recalls that in the beginning of the present century, the opium addicts of the whole city used to gather and recite ghazals and verses in the fair of Tar held on the day following Id, in Aish Bagh.[32]

According to Sharar, lower-class people developed a practice, called Khayal (imagination) according to which they would sit in a circle, compose extemporary verses and recite them then and there.[33] There was yet, another form of folk poetry called danda (club). Poems were composed to describe important events and personalities in their true colour indulging in severe criticism or fulsome praise with complete freedom of expression and then recited in a special way while dandas were beaten musically.[34]

Urdu Prose

Unlike other language, Urdu began its existence as a written language with poetry. Urdu prose was used in conversation but when it came to correspondence or penning one's thought, Persian was used as a vehicle of expression.[35] In fact, Persian having been the court language throughout Muslim Rule in India, it was considered prestigeous and elegant to correspond in Persian. In fact, most of books on religion, arts and sciences continued to be written in Persian.[36] The credit for development of Urdu prose, must unreservedly go to the British who in their desire to adopt a new and more popular language in place of Persian as their official language, chose Urdu for this role. Calcutta Madarasa under the stewardship of Dr. John Gil Christ drafted many Urdu scholars on its service and prepared textbooks for British freshers in India and also produced many books in simple prose. Among them was Bagho Bahar, a translation of the Persian story Chhahar Darvesh (The Four Dervishes) by Mir Amman, a resident of Delhi, in 1801. Although, then it was not accorded any literary merit by the learned men of Urdu[37], it was, nevertheless, a trend-setter for simple prose.

Independent of Fort William or Delhi influence, Insha wrote the story of Rani Ketki. He not only used a simple language but took meticulous care not to use any Arabic or Persian word. This story which spreads only on fifty pages,[38] is a specimen of earliest prose in Urdu and Hindi both. However, this work remained an odd and individual effort as its style was not adopted or appreciated by other writers of Lucknow.

Sharar traces the origin of old literary Urdu prose to Lucknow and Fisnai Ajaib written by Rajab Ali Beg Suroor. He also wrote Fisnai-i-Ibrat published in 1884 A.D. which is a history of Avadh rulers from Nasiruddin Haider to Wajid Ali Shah and has been cited in this book.

Rajab Ali Beg was born in 1787 A.D. Besides being a prose writer, he was a poet and a calligraphist. He was in the service of Sharfuddaulah Mohammad Ibrahim Khan, the Vizier of Mohammad Ali Shah.[39] Later he served Maharaja Ishwari Prasad Singh of Banaras. He breathed his last in 1867. In contrast to Mir Amman's simple style, Suroor employs flowery language and rhyming sentences. The style which has now been completely discarded, was called Nasr-e-Musajja i.e. adorned prose.

Maulvi Ghulam Imam Shahid, a contemporary of Mohammad Ali Shah and Amjad Ali Shah, was another author who had adopted this style. His important works were Maulude-e-Sharif and Insha-e-Bahare-e-Bekhazan.[40] Much later, Pandit Ratan Nath

Sarshar (1846-1902) employed the same style in an improved form in his voluminous novel. Fisnai Azad which describes the adventures of Azad, the hero of the novel, which were first serialized in Avadh Akhbar of which Sarshar was the editor, before it was published in book form in 1880. Fisnai Azad has been hailed as the first novel in Urdu literature. Sarshar who had a rudimentary knowledge of English, has tried to portray Don Quixote in the form of Azad in an Indian setting. Like his English counterpart, Azad too is impractical and lands himself into ludicrous situations. Incidentally, Fisnai Azad throws considerable light on the culture and society of Lucknow of late nineteenth century. Its popularity in India has been rightly compared to that of Charles Dicken's Pickwick Papers in England.[41]

Faqir Mohammad Khan Goya who was a great political force during the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider, wrote his famous work—Bustan-e-Hikmat, a translation of a Persian book, Anwar Suheli. However, he did not adopt the jingling style of Suroor.[42]

We have already made a passing reference to the literary contribution of Shia divines and Sunni maulvis of Firangi Mahal. Among the Shia rulers, Wajid Ali Shah was a prolific writer both in prose and poetry. His book, Bani spread over about 400 pages, covers a large number of musical topics, ragas and rahases. He mentions thirty-six rahases as his original work.[43] A study of these rahases shows that most of the themes are not based on Hindu mythology although one of them bears the title 'Radha' but does not deal with Radha-Krishna theme. However, Wajid Ali Shah has used this theme in two of his other rahases. Although, his rahases have a number of songs, the significant point is that the dialogues are in prose[44] unlike Indra Sabha. The language used is simple and the author has even tried to use the dialect of the countryside where considered necessary. Wajid Ali Shah has thus, made a poineering and original contribution towards development of drama in prose.

The habit developed by the royalty and nobility, both men and women, to hear stories led to the production of many dastans or long stories. The opium addicts too made listening of stories an essential item of the agenda in their gatherings. It is, therefore, no surprise that during Nawabi days, a large number of story tellers flourished. They were capable of preparing a story at the spur of the moment or modifying or changing a story to suit the whims or desires of the listener.

No wonder, Lucknow is closely linked with development of folk-tales in Urdu language. A large number of dastans were composed in those days. Mohammad Ata Hussain Tahsin wrote Char Darvesh Ka Quissa (The story of Four Dervishes) mainly in the period of Shujauddaulah in or around 1775. Insha wrote his famous story Rani Ketki Ki Kahani in or around 1803, which is claimed by both Hindi and Urdu wallahs as a work of their respective language.

In the beginning of nineteenth century Mohammad Bux Mahjoor who originally hailed from Fatehpur Huswa but had settled at Luckhow, wrote Inshai Gulshane Naubahar, Inshai Char Chaman and Inshai Nauratan. All these dastans were fairly popular in the nineteenth century.[45]

The most important story teller or for that matter prose-writer of Lucknow, however, was Mirza Rajab Ali Beg Suroor with whom our readers are by now fairly well acquainted. He was author of four well-known dastans of his day, namely, Fisnai Ajaib (1828), Shagufai Mohabbat (1856), Gulzar-e-Suroor (between 1859-1864) and Shabistane Suroor (1864). Fisnai Ajaib has been considered by Gian Chand Jain as the first important published dastan of northern India. Its story has many points of similarity with Masnavi Sahrul Beyan, Katha Satsagar, Bahar-e-Danish, Gulshane-Bhare Nau, Padmavat and Dastan-e-Amir Hamza.[46] In 1872, Jafar Ali Shivan Kakorvi, a shagird of Suroor, wrote a dastan, Telismat-e-Hairat on the lines of Fisnai Ajaib.[47]

In India, we have many versions of the famous Arabian Nights in different languages. In Urdu alone Jain has counted at least fifteen versions.[48] Of these Alif Laila by Ratan Nath Sarshar was published in two volumes in 1901. Munshi Dwarika Prasad Ufq completed translation of Alif Laila from the English Arabian Nights in twelve volumes in 1912—on the request of Nawal Kishore Press but the work has remained unpublished.[49]

Dastane Amir Hamza was very popular in Lucknow especially among the Shias as it was believed that the Amir Hamza of the dastan was uncle of the Prophet or was Hazrat Ali himself. According to Gian Chand Jain, the hero of the dastan was an entirely different person, Hamza, son of Abdullah-ul-Shari, a leader of the Kharjis in the period of Harunul Rashid. His exploits were recorded by his adherents in the book, Maghazai Hamza written in the nineteenth century A.D. Later to make the book universally popular amongst the Muslims, the Iranians substituted Hamza son of Abdul Mutlib in place of the original hero and infidels in place of Abbasite Caliphs with whom the original Hamza was at war. However, the Urdu version of the dastan has undergone large scale changes. The portion called Tilism Hosh Ruba is completely an Indian addition. The various versions of the dastan were written in Rampur and Lucknow. The Lucknow chain of the Dastan, consists of two series of twenty-nine volumes, Tilism Hosh Ruba, in eight volumes, which is part of both the series, is the most famous. The main authors of the dastan in Lucknow, were Tasadduq Hussain, Mohammad Hussain Jah and Munshi Ahmad Hussain Qamar, Mohammad Hussain Jah was a shagird of Munshi Fida Ali, a famous story teller of Lucknow. He was employed by the Nawal Kishore Press to write Tilism Hosh Ruba. When he had completed four volumes, he left the Press on account of a dispute. Jah ranks high among the authors of Dastan-e-Amir Hamza because of his colourful treatment of the subject and literary value of his work.[50]

Munshi Ahmad Husain Qamar was entrusted by the Newal Kishore Press to take up the work left unfinished by Jah. He completed volumes V (two parts), VI and VII and added two more volumes to the voluminous work. He also wrote Tilism Fitnai Nur Afshan, Tilism Haft Paikar, Tilism-e-Khaiyal Sikdandari and Tilism-e-Naukhez Jamshedi, all parts of the Amir Hamza story. He was writing yet another chain of this dastan under the title Zafar Zare Sula imani when he died in 1901.[51]

Sheikh Tassadduq Husain completed the incomplete dastan of Qamar. It is said that the Sheikh was illiterate and therefore, scribes were employed to take dictation from him. He wrote Naushevwan-nama, Harrmuznama and other parts of Amir Hamza series. Payare Mirza collaborated with Tassadduq Hussain in writing Taurajnama. Other important dastan writers of Lucknow were Mirza Raza Ali, Anwar Husain Arzoo, Syed Miran Abru Rizvi and Syed Ashiq Hussain Bazm. Many of their works have, however, remained unpublished.[52]

The dastans of Lucknow's writers in general and Tilism Hosh Ruba in particular throw considerable light on the life and culture of Lucknow.*[52]

Under the influence of Fort William, prose writers in Delhi and neighbouring cities, had adopted a simpler style in the middle of nineteenth century. Foremost among them were Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Maulvi Mohammad Husain Azad and Maulana Iltaf Husain Hali.[53] Ultimately their writings made their impact on Lucknow too. The top most among the early writers of simple prose, was Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926), author of the famous work, Guzastha Lakhnau translated into English by E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Husain under the title, 'Lucknow : The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture'. The noteworthy thing about Sharar is that he spent his early years (1869-1877) at Matiaburz where his father, Munshi Qamaruddin was employed by Wajid Ali Shah. In 1882, he started a magazine Mahshar and wrote under the pen name of Maulvi Mohammad Abdul Basit Mahshar. To quote Sharar himself this magazine 'reproduced Addison's style in Urdu in such an attractive way and with such suitable wording and ideas that it was universally admired among Urdu speaking people.'[54] In 1887, he started a monthly magazine Dil Gudaz whose style 'appealed to those who knew English and to those with old fashioned ideas.'[55] Dil Gudaz also serialized Sharar's novels, mostly historical, for instance Malikul Aziz Varjinia (1888), Hasan Angelina (1889) and Mansur Mohana (1890). Besides historical novels, Sharar wrote books on history, biographies of important Muslim personalities, social novels like Agha Sadiq Ki Shadi and Badrunnisa Ki Musibat, a few dramas and even poetry. Sharar will always be remembered as harbinger of simple prose in Lucknow's Urdu, an essayist of repute, a historian of Islam, in short as a prolific writer who could write with his masterly pen on any topic or subject under the sun notwithstanding the controversies his writings sometimes generated.

If credit for development of modern prose goes to Sharar, Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa (1857-1931) is responsible for introducing novel writing on modern lines in Urdu. Like Sharar, Ruswa too was a versatile. Besides novels, he also wrote essays and poetry. Among his well known novels are Umrao Jan Ada (since translated into English under the title 'The Courtesans of Lucknow' by Khushwant Singh and M.A. Husaini), Sharif Zada and Zat-e-Sharif. As Ruswa himself points out, locale of most of his novels is Lucknow.[56] They throw floods of light on Lucknow's culture, courtesans and corruption. He writes with ease and confidence. He is not only master of his pen but also possess an intimate and usually personal knowledge of the subject of his novels.

The story of Urdu journalism in Lucknow begins with the ascendancy of British power in Lucknow. In or around 1857, a paper Tilism-e-Lakhnau was published from

Lucknow.[57] Munshi Nawal Kishore started a paper Avadh Akhbar in 1859. Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar was its editor from 1878 to 1894. The paper devoted some pages for literary writing. It had a long span of life as it continued to remain in circulation till 1944.[58] Nawal Kishore Press started publication of yet another paper 'Tafrih' costing one paise. As its name signifies, it was meant for light and humorous reading. It stopped coming out in 1914.[59] Avadh Punch began its life as a humorous journal in 1877. Munshi Sajjad Husain, its editor was not only himself a powerful and witty writer but was able to secure contributions from important writers of the day, such as Mirza Machhu Beg, Sitam Zarif, Sharar, Ahmad Ali Shauq, Tribhuwan Nath Hijr, Ratan Nath Sarshar, Jwala Prasad Burq, Ahmad Ali Kasmandavi and Akbar Allahabadi. Munshi Shajjad Husain adopted a progressive and secular line and differed with Sir Syed in his pro-British and anti-Congress approach.[60] Because of its witty criticism, pungent satire, humorous articles and pro-people and independent policy, Avadh Punch was widely read. Perhaps it would be no exaggeration to say that no Urdu paper of Lucknow has so far been able to come anywhere near Avadh Punch in popularity and quality of its writing. The paper stopped in 1912 when its founder-editor, Munshi Sajjad Husain died. The paper was restarted by Hakim Mumtaz Hussain Usmani in 1930 and remained in circulation till early forties.

The story of literary attainments of Lucknow, would not be complete if we omit to make a reference to the libraries and printing presses set up by the Nawabs. The Royal Library of Avadh was set up in the days of Shuja Uddaulah. It was augmented with books from the library of Hafiz Rahmatullah when Rohilkhand was annexed to Avadh in 1774. The Library received special attention during the Asafi period when the number of books, all hand-written, was about three lacs. The Library drew the attention of the British in 1847. A.S. Springer, an Englishman, was drafted to prepare a catalogue of the manuscripts of the library. In a period of eighteen months, he was able to prepare a list of ten thousand Arabic, Persian and Urdu manuscripts. After fall of Avadh, the library passed into British hands. A large number of valuable and rare manuscripts were shifted to Great Britain. Most of the remaining books were damaged or destroyed in the turmoil of 1857.[61]

It was Ghaziuddin Haider who laid foundations of Typography in Lucknow. In or around 1830, a Europen named Archer, shifted to Lucknow from Kanpur along with his litho printing press and published a number of books under royal patronage.[62] According to Sharar, the first private press was started by Haji Harmain Sharifain, Mustafai Press and Alvi Press came into being in quick succession. Among the other presses started during the Nawabi Rule, were Matbai Wali Mohammad, Matbai Murtazavi, Matbai Muhammad, Matbai Subhani and Matbai Asghari.[63] By far the most important press whose services for promotion of Urdu language and literature would always be gratefully remembered by Urdu lovers, was set up by Munshi Nawal Kishore (1835-1894) in 1888.[64] Originally, the press published Arabian, Persian and Sanskrit classics and religious books but soon it began publication of Urdu works of contemporary writers of prose and poetry. The Munshi took meticulous care in the printing of Muslim religious books as well as marsiyas, salams and nauhas with the result that the Nawal Kishore Press soon became popular among the Muslims as publisher of their religious books. Undoubtedly, the Nawal Kishore Press, Munshi Nawal Kishore and his successors have played a historical role in the development of Urdu literature. The Press has now been bifurcated as Raja Ram Kumar Press and Tej Kumar Press and has lost its premier position among the publishers of Urdu books.

Conversation

As in poetry, so in prose, Urdu became the language of the masses in Lucknow. Much of the fame, the Lucknowites acquired as a cultured, sophisticated and refined people, owed it to the language they spoke and to the politeness and refinement exhibited in their conversation. Even the slogans coined by the sellers of goods, pleased the ears. For instance, a vendor selling kakris (thin and small kakris were preferred) would shout :

"*Eat Kakris,*
Fingers of Laila,
Ribs of Majnun !"

A flower-seller would say :[65]

"*Whas sweet smelling flowers,*
O'beauties, they are fit for Majnu's neck.

To make their conversation lively, the Lucknowites frequently made use of phabtis and zila jagat.

Phabti is a form of speech in which a subject and his conduct were described in a humorous but telling manner, so as to provoke the audience to laugh or smile at the victim. Agha Mahdi quotes a phabti heard by Niaz Fatehpuri. On seeing a tall woman clad in a burqah, on a Rajab nauchandi at the Karbala of Talkatora, one of the spectators remarked "Brother I see, some one has lifted and brought the covered chandelier from the Imambara of Husainabad."[66] Agha Mahdi mentions yet another phabti attributed to a kunjara (a fruit seller) who was selling oranges. A tall man began to bargain the price of the oranges, standing near the stall. He said to the Kunjara "Your oranges are small, but you demand price of big ones". "Sir", said the kunjara in all humility, "The oranges are not small. Kindly sit down and then look at them".[67]

Zila Jagat was a device to add wit to the conversation by using words with double meaning. It was a way of handling words in which most of the ideas introduced, linked up with the idea conveyed by the first words.[68] The people of Lucknow had acquired great proficiency in zila jagat. In his Fisanai Azad, Sarshar has devoted a small chapter on zila jagat and has given illustrations of zilas originating from hookah, betels and food. Some of the zilas based on food are given here.[69]

Zila	*Meaning (other than the obvious)*
Khichri is cooking	: Some thing is being conspired.
There is something black in dal	: There is a ground for suspicion.
All the five fingers are in the ghee	: Having a spell of good luck.
Head in frying pan	: In trouble.

Besides using these devices, the people of Lucknow were famous for their repartees. Once the famous courtesan Mushtai was performing a mujra in a marriage. She was singing a ghazal of the famous Delhi poet, Zauq. One of the young men among the audience who too knew the ghazal by heart, would recite the second line of couplet as soon as Mushtari sang the first line. When his antics became unbearable, Mushtari turned towards him and said quietly 'Why don't you replace me ? I am really not needed.'[70]

Despite use of phabtis, zilas and repartees, the Lucknowites were never rude and rough in their conversation. They were always very polite and soft spoken. Sharar is right when he says that no language in the world has more honorific words of address than Urdu and that the masses and the educated people of Lucknow spoke better Urdu than many poets and men of letters of other places.[71]

The women especially spoke very politely and courteously. It was a pleasure, a bliss, to hear them talk. It can be said with some justification that the spoken language of Lucknow was, in many respects, better than the written one. Alas ! this good language of Lucknow is more or less a thing of the past but still some old people exist, with whom it is a pleasure to talk. There is a strong case to take steps to codify and preserve the rich oral literature of Lucknow right not lest it should prove too late.

To sum up, Lucknow's contribution towards development of Urdu Literature, poetry and prose, was in no way less vital, or less important than that of Delhi. Although in all fairness, it should be conceded that it was Delhi which acquainted Lucknow with this language. In Lucknow not only the royalty and noblility patronized the language but Lucknowites as a whole embraced and adopted it warmly. No wonder, it soon acquired the status of a people's language whose oral literature was in no way less rich than the written one.

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6

SHAM-E-AVADH

In one direction are located tents of whores
Surrounding them are the pleasure seekers
Ascertain one is humming a tune
Another is levelling her voice
—*Tilism Hosh Ruba*

The famous Sham-e-Avadh i.e. evenings of Avadh, owe their fame and popularity to the courtesans of Lucknow, who held evening parties to entertain their patrons and to attract new customers. To visit the courtesans in their suites or to invite them to male sitting rooms, was considered to be a socially accepted decent recreation for members of the nobility and gentry. The King and male members of his household too patronized the courtesans and did not hesitate to marry them and raise them to the status of honoured begums when they felt like doing so. No wonder, the courtesans occupied an important and influential position in the socio-cultural life of Lucknow. It is, therefore, necessary that any study of Lucknow's culture, must take into account the significant role of courtesans and dancing girls in moulding and shaping this culture.

Prostitution, harlotry, whoredom, twaif-bazi in Lucknow's parlance, or any other name, one gives to sale and purchase of sex, is not only the oldest profession in the world but the relationship between culture and courtesan is as ancient as civilization itself.

While sale of sex, has been sine qua non of the profession of courtesans, attainment of a certain degree of proficiency in fine arts, has always-been considered a highly desirable qualification for a woman who wished to make a mark in this calling. Therefore since times immemorial, the courtesans have taken pains to learn singing and dancing.

Historical Background

While it is admittedly difficult to trace the origin of prostitution, the profession is decidedly more than 6,000 years old. According to a Greek traveller, Hero Otts, prostitutes were the main contributors to the fund raised for construction of the Tomb of King Ilyanis. We also have it that women of Babylon visited the Temple of Goddess Aphrodite to sell their bodies. Similarly Greek girls offered themselves to pilgrims to the temple of Goddess Florelia to earn money. Prostitution was a flourishing trade during the days of Alexander, the Great, in Macedonia. No social taboos were attached to prostitution. As a matter of fact, a woman was ridiculed by others if she was not taken out by men. It is believed that it was Hakim Solan who first organized prostitution on commercial lines to curb immorality among Greek women.[1]

In India, prostitution is older than the known history. Indian epics refer to apasaras like Menka, Rambha and Urvashi who were women of superb beauty and accomplished dancers. Aryan rulers developed the system of guest prostitution by offering beautiful girls to friendly rulers. Vishkanyas, fed on poisonous food, were used to entice away enemies and kill them. Prostitutes were available in plenty during the days of Pandavas and Kauravas. In Brahmanic India, slave girls and concubines were used for pleasure by the aristocracy. References to laws on morality are to be found in Smrities. Kautilya enumerates rules for prostitution in his famous treatise, Arthshastra, Kamsutra written in the third century B.C. by Vatsyayan, has devoted a number of pages to prostitutes and prostitution. We read about sanctified prostitution in the third century A.D. in the works of Kalidasa. Later, we come across temple prostitutes known as Devadasis in the South and Mangala Mukhies in the North.[2] The system having flourished for centuries, has now become, more or less, extinct.

Despite Quranic ban on prostitution, most of Muslim rulers, patronized prostitution and a large number of them maintained harems consisting of hundreds of women.

There is ample evidence of settlements of prostitutes in and around Delhi.[3] It is said that Muslim divines used to impress upon Il-tutmash not to abolish prostitution in the larger interest of society. In his treatise, Ajaib-ul-Saffar, Ibne Batoota mentions existence of a red light district, called Tarababad (Settlement of Pleasure) within Daultabad, the capital built by Mohammad Shah Tuqhlaq.[4]

During the reign of King Kaiqobad who collected a large number of courtesans for his pleasure, it was ensured that before being presented to him, the courtesans were properly trained in horse riding, archery and arrow shooting, besides singing and art of conversation. Mubarak Khilji, notorious for his debauchery, was always surrounded by women of all types. Alla-ud-din-Khilji who had a penchant for fixing rates of commodities also divided prostitutes in three categories and fixed rates for each category. Mugh-ud-din Behram Shah's indulgence in women, led to influx in the number of prostitutes in Delhi.[5]

Prostitution under the Mughals

With the exception of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperors were fond of women and the institution of prostitution flourished under their rule. However, the story of rapid rise of prostitution begins with the decay of Mughal power in eighteenth century, when the courtesans, not satisfied with the courtesies and favours showered on them in bed rooms, gradually gained admittance in the darbars and secured public recognition and respectability. Most important among them all was a dancer, Lal Kunwar, daughter of a Kalawant, who ruled over Jahandar Shah, Emperor of Delhi (1712-1713). Her brothers were given high ranks and many other Kalawants obtained important offices through her good offices. A female green grocer who was a companion of Lal Kunwar, was so powerful in the darbar of the Emperor that every morning a crowd would wait at her residence to secure her recommendations for the Emperor and nobles. Lal Kunwar was a constant companion of the Emperor even in battles. In his last battle with Farrukhsiyar, in which he was defeated, he took shelter in her howdah.[6] A contemporary poet speaks thus of Niyamat Khan, a brother of Lal Kunwar.

If the King's brother-in-law commits atrocities
why grumble?
His sister, decoration of the palace and he,
brother of the beloved.

It the courtesans had gained a foot-hold in the reign of Jahandar Shah, they rode over the shoulders of the Emperor and nobles in the days of Mohammad Shah (1719-1748) who was aptly nicknamed 'Rangiley' i.e. the colourful. His harem was full of street girls, domanies, harlots and others. It is said that a three huudred strong troupe of naked female dancers was always in attendance before him.[7] Foremost among the courtesans who ruled over Mohammed Shah and exercised considerable political influence in the darbar, were Nurbai, Panna, Tanne, Channi, Chakmak Domani and Udham Bai. The last mentioned was later admitted in the harem and became an honoured begum. The nobles of Ahamad Shah, following in the footsteps of their Emperor, lived a life of licentiousness and lechery.

Mohammad Shah's son, Ahmad Shah (1748-1754) upheld the traditions of debauchery and womanisation he inherited from his father and grandfather with greater zeal and vigour. Around his palace, there were women, women and women everywhere. His vizier, Javed Khan lived openly in the palace as the paramour of Udham Bai who had been a begum of late Mohammad Shah. The type of respect the royal household and nobles commanded and the influence they exercised, can be assessed from the manner of demonstration staged by palace guards to protest against non-payment of salaries. They got hold of a dog and a bitch. Whoever came to the palace, was made to pay obeisance to the dog (representing Javed Khan) and the bitch (representing Udham Bai).[8]

Despite his religiousness, Alamgir II (1754-1759) was fond of women. The harem of Shah Alam II (1759-1808) consisted of five hundred women. Even when he had taken shelter under the British in the Allahabad Fort, he continued to have female dancers around him. The last Mughal Emperor, the unfortunate Bahadur Shah (1837-57) maintained the traditional interest of his predecessors in women and courtesans. So did his son, Mirza Fathul-Mulk Rumz who had a passion to witness mujra and enjoy singing.[9]

Taking the cue from the Emperor, the nobility and gentry too patronised courtesans and dancing girls. Poets, writers and members of the gentry, did not consider it in any way derogatory to visit the quarters of courtesans or to patronise them. As many of the courtesans exercised influence with the darbar, many nobles and respectable people sought their favour to have access to the Emperor. It was, therefore, no surprise that the prostitutes and dancing girls, gained ascendancy in society and acquired respectability with the help of their wealth.

Urdu poets specially seem to have been greatly attached to the courtesans. Many used to visit their kothas to recite their ghazals. It may be mentioned that it was fashionable in those days, for dancing girls to recite the kalam of prominent poets. Among the doyens of Urdu poetry who had affairs and intimate relationship with courtesans of Delhi, can be counted such celebrities as Mirza Ghalib, Momin, Mir Taqui and Shefta as well as prominent figures like Ibrahim Beg Maqtal, Shah Alam Aftab, Amir Khan Anjam, Budh Singh Qulandar (who changed his religion to win the favours of a courtesan) and Ahsan Khan Ahsan.[10]

The main centres of whoredom and dancing in those days where the courtesans exposed themselves to public view and held their mahfils, were Chowk Saadat Ullah Khan and even now famous and very much alive, Chandni Chowk. A poet said :

Since that beauty, has settled in my heart
The bazar of Chandni Chowk has been set up in my heart

In the encouraging atmosphere of a declining empire, the courtesans of Delhi get full opportunities to display their talents. Many of them were not only accomplished dancers and singers but were also good conversationalits in polished Urdu. Some of them had not only a good command over Urdu Literature but were poetesses of sorts in their own right. Rajju who was intimate with Shefta, was herself a poetess with Nazakat as her takkhallus.[11] Mah, Farrukh Baksh Farrukh and Zarafat were some other poetesses belonging to this class.[12]

While conceding that the courtesans of Delhi too contributed their mite to the downfall of the Mughal Empire, it may be emphasized that they themselves were a product of the decline set in after Aurangzeb. So was Urdu poetry of Delhi. Both, however, played a significant role in shaping the culture of that period.

Migration to Lucknow

Lucknow must necessarily be treated as a fall-out of Delhi. The first two Nawabs of Lucknow, Burhanul Mulk and Safdar Jung who spent more time in Delhi than in Avadh, were soldiers who assiduously avoided pleasures of life in order to carve out a principality of their own. Therefore, despite their close link with the court of Mohammad Shah Rangiley, they did not fall in line with other nobles of his court, who were completely given to women and wine.

With Shuja ud-daulah, however, things began to change. Shuja-ud-daullah was by nature amoral and fond of women. After his defeat in the Battle of Buxar, he made

Faizabad his Capital from where he ruled for nine years. This period saw the complete disintegration and ruination of Delhi. Even the nominal Emperor Shah Alam left it to live at Allahabad under British protection. It resulted into a large exodus of soldiers, poets, musicians and courtesans from Delhi to Faizabad where the Nawab-Vizier had both money and inclination to patronize fine arts and artists. According to Sharar, Faizabad became crowded with courtesans and dancing girls. Many courtesans toured with the Nawab and lived in stately tents specially pitched for them near the Nawab's Camp.[13] According to Mohammad Faiz Baksh, Shuja-ud-daulah used to be accompanied by a hundred or even more deras (tents) of women who practised the art of music and dancing. The nobles following the Nawab, too, brought courtesans during tours, alongwith them. The result was that the camp of the Nawab on tour, resembled the atmosphere of a fair. The courtesans had amassed a large wealth and the superior ones among them had two to three tents each.[14]

Thus, thanks to Shuja-ud-daulah, Faizabad became a prosperous city and a centre of art and culture, to a large extent at the cost of Delhi (Jahanabad). According to Juraat :

The heavens, having ruined Jahanabad
Well habitated Faizabad

During this period Lucknow remained neglected and deserted. When Asaf-ud-daulah shifted the capital again to Lucknow soon after his succession, most of the musicians and courtesans too moved into Lucknow. He maintained his father's tradition of taking courtesans on tours. A large number of twaifs were in his employment. A courtesan named Bari Misri was his favourite and frequent companion during tours. Among noted courtesans and singers of Asafi period were Najhan, Salaro, Karim Baksh, Ram Kali, Radha Baoli, Hirajan, Khurshed Jan and Jalalo.[15] Asaf-ud-daulah also used to hold jashneam (open darbar) on occasions like Holi and Basant when singing and dancing were performed on a large scale.

The migration of courtesans from Delhi to Lucknow continued during the days of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan. Insha, a poet of Saadat Ali Khan's Court describes how a courtesan Nuran, and noble, both of whom had come to Lucknow from Delhi, talked of Delhi with nostalgia.[16] Saadat Ali Khan celebrated Holi in a grand manner and rewarded dancing girls on this occasion lavishly. He also participated in the revelries of Nishat bagh gatherings. However, being an elderly man he took a vow at the dargah of Hazarat Abbas in 1803 i.e. five years after attaining the masnad of Avadh, to abstain from women and wine.[17]

Peak Period

His successor, Ghaziuddin Haider who had a large number of women in his harem, also maintained a group of women called 'asamian' who were used by him for his pleasure but were not treated as begums.[18]

It was, however, with the ascension of the youthful king Nasiruddin Haider on the throne of Avadh in 1827 that Lucknow became a replica of Delhi of Mohammad Shah Rangiley's days. He plunged himself headlong into a life of pleasure and debauchery. He loved the company of courtesans and dancing girls. His officials, Lala Ram Prasad and Mahraja Mewa Ram picked up a large number of beautiful courtesans and dancing girls who were admitted in the harem and were collectively titled Aish Mahal (Pleasure of the Palace). Among them was a noted courtesan of the day, Karam Bux. Nasiruddin squandered the resources of the state on womanization and revelries.

Suroor gives interesting details of the revelries of Nasiruddin Haider. Here is a description of how the king spent an evening.[19]

"No sooner, the king graced his seat, than the fairies began to dance. There was an English band playing outside . . . . If Madam Fortune smiled on someone and stars favoured her, His Majesty summoned her and made her eat and drink with him. If intimacy was desired, her misfortunes were over for ever because she was loaded with riches in an instant. The king gifted a thousand dresses and five hundred bejewelled kares to courtesans who wore them on their soft wrists.

"At midnight, the gathering dispersed. Then superbly attired singers and dancers attended the king. One started fanning him, another began narration of a story. Yet another recited a couplet. Whosoever was lucky, got her share of favours . . . ."

The courtesans were employed in the palace to perform interesting but sometimes odd jobs. Sample the following.[20]

"A certain person presented him (Nasiruddin Haider) a book on ragas and raginis. He desired that raginis be represented by suitably attired women. Bhairvi ragini was represented by five hundred women dressed as brides with menhdi applied on hands and feet who were wearing jewelleries from head to feet. The show far one ragini alone lasted for thirty days. No doubt it humbled the assembly of Indira. Imagine what a function it would have been and how much it would have cost".

Let us hear from Suroor what happened to this assembly of courtesans and dancing girls after Nasiruddin Haider.[21]

"Now hear two words about the ruination of this assembly and shamelessness and throwing away of the veil on the part of the fairy-like beauties of the deceased king, Mirza Nasiruddin Haider. After ascending the throne, the new king (Mohammed Ali Shah) looked into the list of courtesans and fixed allowances according to merit. He also continued the wasiqa of the wives. But the contemptible class of prostitutes have never known the value of heavenly gitfs. The petitioned (the new king) that they be permitted to go to their homes to see their parents. Having understood their real intentions, the king cautioned that whosoever went out, would not get anything other than a pair of dress. These ill intoxicated left behind whatever they had amassed and came out. Some sat at the Chowk, many took lovers and others carried on trade clandestinely. In short, during those days, the courtesans were so numerous that lanes and byelanes of Lucknow were full of them."

The nobles of Nasiruddin Haider, following their ruler, patronized courtesans openly. Here mention may be made of Piyare, the concubine of the Prime Minister. Hakim Mehdi Ali Khan, who is credited to have helped him financially to build himself up in the early phase of his career.[22] Roshan-ud-daulah, another Prime Minister of Nasiruddin Haider, was having a courtesan, Husaini alias Mahbuban in his harem and used her to win the King's favours for himself. The king liked her so much that he took the unusual step of conferring on her a title (Sarfaraz Mahal).[23]

Naziruddin's successor, Mohammad Ali Shah was an old man, but in his youth, he too was fond of beautiful women. Amjad Ali Shah, his successor was a man of religious bent of mind. Nevertheless, he had an eye for beautiful women. While Suroor who is openly hostile to him, alleges that 'if the sister is attending on the King, then the brother is his counsellor'[24] and he who has sent his youthful daughter inside, wields influence outside.[25] We also find that under the influence of the Mujtahid-ul-Asr, he banned prostitution. There are, however, reasons to believe that the efforts did not succeed much. The prostitutes continued to operate under the cover of muta which by stretching Shia tenet on the subject, enabled the pleasure seekers to enter into temporary marriages even for a few hours. There was also a mohkmai Arbab-e-Nishat i.e. Department of Entertainers dealing with courtesans and dancing girls during his reign.[26]

It was during Amjad Ali Shah's so called puratanic reign that his son, Prince Wajid Ali indulged in amorous adventures on a big scale. A study of his autobiography shows that not only the courtesans were in existence but they were operating in full view of royalty. When a son was born to the Prince, dances were performed by 'paris'.[27] Then there is the story of how Wajid Ali secured a courtesan for himself. One day when he was having a session of dances and songs, his younger brother Mirza Sikandar Hashmat Bahadur joined him. He told his elder brother that he had met a courtesan who was not only beautiful but was unparalleled in singing and dancing. Wajid Ali requested his younger brother to bring her to him next morning. As soon as Wajid Ali saw Waziran, a daughter of Bijan in prime of youth, he fell in love with her instantly. As her mother resisted sending the daughter to the Prince's harem telling his emissaries "Why should the Government darogha come to the house of prostitutes?" In his desperation Wajid Ali decided to shoot himself with a pistol. This clinched the issue and Waziran was forcibly brought to the Prince's bed room and later admitted into his harem. Her mother was arrested under orders of Aminuddaulah, the Prime Minister but released after a few months on the intervention of the Prince. Waziran later became his favourite wife with the title of Nigar Mahal but her fortune declined after a year or so.[28]

The courtesans also visited the houses of nobles. There was yet another Waziran, a dancer who attracted the attention of Prince Wajid Ali. She was on visiting terms with

Azimullah, Kamin-dar at whose house Wajid Ali met her in a secret session at which was also present Nawab Ali Naqui Khan[29] who later became Wajid Ali Shah's Vizier and father-in-law.

The resources of the Department of Entertainers were fully exploited to secure women for the prince. Let us have this confirmed by Prince Wajid Ali himself.[30] The Darogha of Department of Entertainers whose name was Mahdi and who was posted as such in the reign of Jannat Makan (Amjad Ali Shah) persuaded a courtesan, Mahboob Jan who was famed far and wide for playing sarod and dancing to come to me under a pretext . . . . When he found that I had passed a general order to fetch singing girls and admit them in my harem, he thought it was in his interest and conducive to his promotion to bring some one forcibly or under a false plea to me . . . . At another place in his Parikhana, Wajid Ali Shah says[31] "An idea came to my mind that I should admit in my harem as many dancing girls as possible. I used to make this demand on every one. Whoever presented such girls to me, he used the term 'maaruza' (literally, presented, offered) i.e. if it was said a certain maaruza was present, it meant that a certain singing or dancing girl was ready to be admitted in my harem."

Najmunnisa Begum, darogha of his harem and the two sisters, Amman and Imaman were the other chief procurers of girls for the Prince besides Mir Mohammad Mahdi. Najmunnisa Begum deftly managed the delicate affairs of the Prince. She employed eighteen beautiful and bewitching girls known as huzurwalian for Wajid Ali's pleasure.[32] With their help, Wajid Ali organised his fabulous Parikhana, an institute of music. He recruited a large number of young, beautiful and talented girls mainly from amongst the courtesans and arranged for their instruction in music. The women were called pariyan (fairies) and the institution Parikhana (Fairy-house). Most of the courtesans of Lucknow who mattered, were admitted in the Parikhana with the result that it was hard to find any talented dancing girl outside the Parikhana in Lucknow. The fairies were highly paid. The salary of a fairy ranged between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,500 per month depending on her performance and looks. Wajid Ali entered into muta marriage with most of them. The number of fairies was around 150. Among the girls netted for the Parikhana were Mahak Pari (who now adorns the pages of history as Nawab Hazrat Mahal), Sulaiman Pari (Nawab-Sulaiman Mahal), Karam Bux Wali (Nawab Amir Mahal), Pyre-Saheb (Nawab Mashooq Mahal), Gana (Nawab Sarfaraz Mahal) and Haideri (Nawab Sultan Mahal) who later rose high and wielded great influence over Wajid Ali Shah.[33]

In his book Bani, Wajid Ali Shah, mentions the following categories of Female artists employed in the Parikhana.[34] Their numbers are given in brackets :

1. Radh Manzil Walian (18).
2. Rahas Walian (15).
3. Sultan Khani Walian (24).
4. Huzur Walian (11).
5. Suroor Walian (16).

6. Shahenshah Manzil Walian (8).
7. Chhote Jalse Walian (7).
8. Eighth Troupe (5).
9. Ninth Troupe (11).
10. Ghunghad Walian (7).
11. Khas Jalse (7).
12. Nath Walian (7).
13. Latkan Walian (7).
14. Jhumar Walian (7).
15. Jhulni Walian (7).
16. Bindia Walian (7).
17. Marsiya Walian (7).
18. Naqal Walian (7).
19. Tamashe Walian (7).
20. Misahbeen (7).

The king had entered into muta marriage with 112 of these women. There were a number of male and female instructors for training them in music and other arts. Besides them, there were domnis called Suroor-i-Mahfil and doms addressed as Bahar-e-Mahfil. According to Wajid Ali Shah, Rs. 8,598 and Rs. 3,261 were spent on the pay and allowances of the artists and instructors respectively.[35]

The Pari Khana and the Mahalsera were guarded by female Turk sentries, some of whom were given military training by Wajid Ali Shah himself.[36]

When Wajid Ali ascended the throne, most of the fairies were upgraded as begums and were made to severe their links with the parikhana.[37] This put the parikhana in complete disarray. Wajid Ali Shah, however, soon took steps to reorganize the institution. There was yet another reason for strengthening the institution. Soon after his accession to the throne, Wajid Ali Shah is said to have developed palpitation of heart and therefore employed a number of beautiful and shapely girls for his amusements under medical advice. Two of these viz. Chhuttan and Hasan Bandi rose high in King's estimation.[38]

According to Sharar, the King's fondness for good looking woman was, in no way, dampened after his arrival at Matiaburj. The only precaution taken by him was to enter into muta before intimacy. All the women who were employed by him for enjoyment of music, also became his temporary wives. Here too he divided these women into troupes which specialized in the branch of music allotted to them. Most of them lived in Sultan Khan near the King's residence but some of them were allotted separate apartments. Those who became pregnant were made begums i.e. regular wives.[39]

Prostitutes and People

It has, however, to be emphasized that despite large scale patronage to courtesans by the royalty and nobility, majority of them had to be content with clients belonging to the shurafa (gentry) and lower classes.

While the princes and nobles did not visit the Courtesan's Quarters, the gentry and the lower classes did not consider it in any way below their dignity to go to the courtesans who usually lived in well furnished houses in style on upper storeys. Their main residential area was the Chowk, the fashionable market and the heart of the city. Here is an account of Chowk by Von Orlich who visited Lucknow in early nineteenth century.[40]

"The bazars are kept on the ground floor of the houses which are three storeys high: The two upper storeys are furnished with neatly carved verandahs which run like balconies infront of the sitting room. As soon the Sun declines, the inmates of these houses appear in the balconies in a variety of groups and look at the traffic in the streets and as most of the bayadaries reside here and appear unveiled, I had ample opportunity of seeing these fair women of Lucknow. They were all bare headed, and their beautiful black hair fell in braids or was interwoven with jewels : most of them wore long nose-rings, which hung over the corners of the mouth and their long earrings touched their shoulders. Very few of them could be called pretty, but they have piercing eyes which look the more brilliant because their eyes are blackened with antimony. A coloured scarf thrown lightly and gracefully across the neck and shoulders displayed rather than concealed the fine contour of the upper part of their persons. They did not fail to make many remarks upon us and sought to draw our attention by laughing, joking and tittering but it is by no means advisable to pay any attention to them as these bayadaries are extremely importunate."

The Residents of the East India Company posted in Avadh and other inmates of the Residency too extended their patronage to courtesans who were invited to perform mujra on all important and ceremonial occasions. Husaini, who became Nasiruddin's favourite wife later, used to be summoned to the Residency to dance.[41]

Post-Nawabi Period

The rule of Courtesans was not over with the end of Burhanul Mulk's dynastic rule. As already mentioned, the exiled king, Wajid Ali Shah continued to extend his patronage to dancing girls from Matiaburj. Munsarim Wali Gauhar was a noted Courtesan of Lucknow, who migrated to Matiaburj where she won great fame.[42]

The nobility which had been patronising the courtesans during the Nawabi period continued to employ them and shower favours on them. As a matter of fact, some of the nobles who had adopted a subdued attitude in these matters, now having come to their own, tried to follow openly the life style of their ex-rulers. In this way, the royal patron was replaced by a number of patrons of lesser ranks but who were rich. No wonder, the profession quickly retrieved the ground lost by fall of Avadh.

Among the famous Courtesans of post Nawabi period can be counted Allah Bandi, Hasan Bandi, Najja, Babban, Zohra, Mushtari, Hasso, Nanua, Jaddan, Kallan, Haider Jan, Chuna Wali Haider and Jali Khurshed. The last mentioned who became Kubra Begum after nikah, was a good horse rider, a fast cyclist and a keen kite flier.[43]

Origin

According to Sharar, the courtesans of Lucknow belonged to three categories namely; Kanchani, Chunawali and Nagrant. Kanchanis i.e. women of Kanchan tribe, who migrated to Lucknow from the Punjab and Delhi during the days of Shuja-ud-daulah and his early successors, were professional harlots. The Chuna Walis, as the name suggests, were originally lime sellers but later took up harlotry. The Nagrant came from Gujrat and were professional prostitutes.[44] Later many women from the Naik Community of Kumaon hills too swelled the numbers.[45]

Again, sale and purchase of girls, was fairly common in those days. As such, the Courtesans used to purchase girls from families in dire circumstances. Some of the girls sold by families of lower strata of society during famines, were purchased by procurers and prostitutes. Even under normal conditions, pimps and procurers roamed about the countryside and if they came across a pretty face, they persuaded the parents to hand her over to them for a price. Many girls were enticed away or even forcibly kidnapped by these procurers. Umrao Jan Ada, the heroine of the famous Urdu novel of the same name, was abducted by an enemy of the family from Faizabad, then sold to a procurer who confined her in a cell in Lucknow where he had also kept another girl whom he had enticed away from her home earlier. He later sold Umrao Jan to a Khanam of Chowk. Umrao Jan herself purchased a girl, Abadi during a famine.[46] It is thus clear that the courtesans of Lucknow were a mixed breed.

Besides the regular prostitutes, there were a few categories of women who indulged in flirtations and occasional whoredom as a side occupation. Among them can be cited Domini (professional singer), Bhatiarin (female inn keeper), Tambolin (female betel seller), Kunjarin (female green grocer or fruit seller), Kahari (female palanquin bearer) etc. Slave girls who were called bandis, were also used for pleasure. When a traveller from Patna stayed at Sarai Agha Mir in the reign of Amjad Ali Shah, he was served by two youthful Bhatiarins while the inn keeper herself had been employed as a singer in the palace of Nasir-ud-din Haider.[47] Here is a tambolin in action in a mela as depicted in Tilism Hosh Ruba.

Highly lewd, wise in sex
Wearing ornaments of gold
She befooled one lover
And laughingly shed blood of another.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was found that most of the Courtesans were Muslims.[48] Undoubtedly many of them were originally low caste Hindus who may have voluntarily become Muslims or to be precise Shias, in order to improve their social status, which was not possible for them as Hindus because of rigidities of the Caste System and to gain cultural acceptability in the Society they had decided to serve. In the period of Amjad Ali Shah, prostitution was abolished and Sultanul Ulema made special efforts to wean the prostitutes away from their occupation.[49] As muta was found to be a good cover to continue harlotry without attracting law, many Courtesans would have found it expedient to become Shias.

Classification of Courtesans

There were many shades of courtesans in Lucknow. While most of the courtesans carried on their professions openly, there was a class of courtesans known as khangis who lived normal life and maintained usual family ties but sold their charms clandestinely with the help of pimps. The rest of the family although fully aware of the trade, kept themselves completely aloof from these dealings. According to Wajid Ali Shah, Nawab Hazrat Mahal was a Khangi before entering his harem.[50]

With the help of Amman and Imaman
To my house came a khangi
Her sweat smelled like rose
Smelling Fairy was the title I chose.

Takaiyas were cheap prostitutes who had settled in the neighbourhood of Chowk and near Akbari Gate as well as in mohalla Chawal Wali Gali. They were not allowed to operate in Chowk proper.[51] They catered to the needs of lower categories of people. The nobility and gentry shunned their quarters.

Randis were considered fairly respectable prostitutes who were mainly patronized by the gentry as well as poets and men of letters who did not consider it in any way derogatory to visit the kothas of randis. They lived in the heart of Chowk. They would dress bewitchingly and sit in balconies in evenings to attract customers as mentioned by Orlich. While passing through Chowk, even respectable and prominent citizens would not mind looking up and staring at these girls or nodding at them. There are many interesting stories how father and son ran into each other, while the former was climbing down the stairs and the latter was going up the same stairs or while coming to the Chowk from opposite directions and engrossed in looking up, they barged into each other.

The Randis were not only beautiful but were also good artists and had a training in singing and dancing. They lived in style and were sometimes invited by the nobility to their mahfils.[52]

The most select and high class courtesans were called deredar twaifs (tent owning courtesans). They were the descendants of the courtesans of the Mughal Courts maintained for the entertainment of the members of the royal and noble families. They assiduously preserved the traditions of singing and dancing in their families.[53]

Mirza Jaffar Husain who has a first hand knowledge of deredar courtesans of Lucknow has to say the following about them.[53]*

"They were outstanding artists. Many of them were superb dancers and singers. They were suited for harem life. They possessed enviable manners, etiquette and politeness. Many had access to the inner apartments of the nobility. In their mode of living and habits, they approximated the gentry. They would never sit at balconies. The atmosphere of their houses resembled that of the houses of the gentry. Usually a twaif remained attached to one noble for life or spent her life in service of two or three nobles, not simultaneously but one after the other. However, she usually maintained friendly relations with a number of raises."

"These Courtesans did not normally appear in public. The nobility and gentry themselves visited them. However, sometimes they went to see friendly nobles on their own or on request. In the noble's darbar, there would be free and unreserved exchange of views which usually concerned prose, poetry and humour. The courtesan attended such darbars with her face fully covered."

"They considered it necessary to maintain the traditional culture of Lucknow. Their good manners were not assumed but had become imbibed in their life. In fact, the whole atmosphere of their house appeared pure and clean. The nobility and gentry used to send their sons to them to learn culture and etiquette."

Mirza Jaffar Husain himself was sent to the house of Nanhua and Bachua twaifs for such a training.[54]

Although many of the deredar Courtesans too lived in Chowk, others lived in other parts of the town. Allah-Bandi and Najju, for instance, lived in Chawal Wali Gali, Mughal Jan in Sabzi Mandi, Haider Jan in Parcha Wali Gali, Mushtri in Nakhas and Bari Jaddan in Taxal. Their way of living and interior decorations of their houses were of a set pattern. The visitor would invariably find chandeliers, candle holders, qamqame (coloured bulbs) and flower pots in every house. There would be a separate sitting room to receive visitors. The seating arrangement would be on floor or on wooden takhts which would be covered with rugs and carpets. Masnads were placed on them in a neat arrangement. The visitors would be seated prominently while the courtesan would sit on the left or right on a corner of the carpet. She was dressed decently unlike the prostitute on the balcony who revealed her charms. Dressed like a begum, she looked extremely graceful. She used an angia (brassiere) of a thin fine cloth, a kurti or shaluka as a shirt and pyjamas made from twelve yards of cloth, known as kalidar paincha. They covered their breasts with dupattas which had beautiful kamdani work. For winter, the kurtis and shaluka were made from velvet whereas for summer they, were made from muslin. Use of sarees became popular much later in the twentieth century.[55]

The deredars had a well knit panchayat organization of their own. In early twentieth century, this organization was headed by Nanhua and Bachua, the two sisters who were known as Chaudharain. Accordiug to Mirza Jaffar Husnian, when a bill to abolish prostitution was presented before the Central Legislative Council in 1924 or 1925, a protest meeting was organized at the residence of the two Chaudharains and the Mirza and a Taluqdar, Mohammad Ali were picked up to champion their cause before the Government.[56]

Night of Initiation

The courtesans attached great importance to virginity of their girls for the simple reason that a auction of virginity itself was quite remunerative. While among the ordinary prostitutes, deflowering ceremony was called nath utarna, the deredars termed it missi. The fact that a virgin was available for sale, was well publicised among the clients. The highest bidder was chosen to break the seal of virginity.

While the night of initiation was celebrated with pomp and show by all sections of Lucknow's prostitutes, for deredars, it was an elaborate affair bordering a marriage ceremony attended by relations, friends and customers. There were prolonged festivities, singing, dining and drinking. In addition to the agreed price, all the expenses incurred on the occasion were also borne by the purchaser. Like a bride, the girl was taken to a specially decorated room to meet her first lover after the festivities. Among the deredars, it was a common practice for the initiated girl to be the mistress of her first lover for a period on a retaining allowance.

Umrao Jan describes the missi ceremony of one of her fellow girls, Bismillah in the following words :[57]

"Missi of Bismillah was held with great pomp and show. Since the days of royalty to this day, may eyes have never seen such a missi ceremony. The baradari of Dalarm was specially decorated for this function. There were lights from interior to exterior. Courtesans of the city, doms, dharis and Kashmiri bands, all were in attendance. Deredar Courtesans had been invited from far and wide.

"Many noted singers from far off places like Delhi, were invited. For seven days and nights singing and dancing continued".

"Nawab Chhabban Saheb (the breaker to be of the seal) had inherited the property of his grandmother. He was young in age. God knows how the Khanam managed to lure him. The poor man was ultimately trapped. The Nawab spent twenty-five thousand to thirty-thousand rupees on this occasion. After this, Bismillah was employed in the service of the Nawab."

The retaining allowance of deredars was usually on a fixed rate. For instance, the girls of the Chaudharain family charged Rs. 1,000 per month.[58]

Courtesan and Culture

It was a part of Lucknow's culture to keep a courtesan in service by a man of status. There was hardly a Nawab or noble who was without a mistress. Umrao Jan Ada was employed on a retaining allowance of seventy-five rupees per month by a Nawab who was seventy years of age, had no teeth in his mouth, his back was bent and not a single hair was black. He loved his wife dearly and never remained in the diwankhana after 9.00 P.M. Umrao Jan Ada was expected to provide companionship for about two hours in the evening.[59]

As a matter of fact, the Courtesan excepting the class known as Takiya, had come to play an important role in the cultural life of Lucknow for which she was meticulously and assiduously prepared and trained from her childhood days. Singing and dancing, in any case, at least singing, were sine qua non of her profession, for which she obtained instruction from a well known ustad of the day. For instance, Nanhua and Bachua were disciples of a famous musician, Banda din.[60] In addition, she was imparted education in theology, Urdu literature and art of conversation. Important houses had maktabs of their own with maulvis as teachers.[61] As a result, when a girl grew up, she was not only an accomplished dancer and singer but was a highly sophisticated young woman who could keep the audience charmed with her repartees, pleasant jokes and witty conversation punctuated with apt verses. She conducted herself in mahfils with grace and dignity and was treated with respect and deference. It became fashionable for members of nobility to have a courtesan in their keeping not merely for pleasure but also for social distinction.[62]

There are many anecdotes about the witticism of Lucknow's Courtesans. Once Mushtari was performing a mujra in a marriage and was singing a well known ghazal of poet Zauq. Whenever she began a couplet, before she could finish the first line, one of the audience would forestall her by reciting the second line. This was in bad taste. Instead of directly rebuking him, Mushtari turned to him and said in mock earnestness, 'Sir I am hardly needed. Why don't you take my place?'[63]

The same Mushtari was singing another ghazal of poet Zauq in a marriage. At that time, she was pregnant. Knowing this fact, one of the audience recited the following parody by twisting a couplet of the ghazal she was singing :

I hear Bi Mushtari is heavy with child
Any moment, the baby may be born.

Mushtari kept quiet but no sooner had she finished singing, she recited the following lines composing them, then and there.[64]

Why shouldn't you be happy, my brother?
For your sister, is going to give birth to a son.

The poets, too, drew their inspiration from courtesans. They used to visit kothas of courtesans. In fact, some of these courtesans were great patrons of Urdu poetry. A few of them were poetesses in their own right. It was a common sight for poets to walk in the Chowk with their eyes up. Once a poet, Whaid Allahabadi was passing through Chowk on a summer day. He saw a beautiful girl on a balcony cutting a musk melon. He recited the following couplet impromptu.[65]

You are busy preparing slices

Pray, cut a slice from my heart too and keep with you.

One day the poet, Mir Munis who was very handsome, was walking in the Chowk. He found one of the dancing girls eyeing him through her thin dupatta. This prompted him to recite loudly the following lines composed on the spot.[66]

Through your dupatta, you see your admire,

Strained drink of your charms, me you offer.

An easy way to fame for many poets during those days, was to have their ghazals sung by renowned dancing girls. There were, however, a few exceptions too. Husain Bandi, a noted courtesan sang a ghazal of the famous marsiya poet of Lucknow, Mirza Dabeer in a marriage. When the Mirza heard of this, he disapproved of it. Having learnt this, Husain Bandi went to see him. When she was leaving, the Mirza forced on her a bundle containing 500 rupees with a request not to sing his ghazals in future.[67]

Impact on Poets and Poetry

The impact of courtesans on Lucknow's poetry can be judged from the fact that under their influence the poets of Lucknow gave a new direction to the ghazals. They chose a female sweet-heart in place of the hitherto universally popular male as the object of their love. Their expressions amply prove that their sweet-heart is usually an accomplished courtesan. This itself was a landmark in Urdu poetry in as much as it imparted genuineness and sincerity to the expressions of Urdu poets who, for the first time, presented a clear and distinct concept and picture of 'Woman' in Urdu poetry. As the courtesan was the centre of their thought, they freely gave an expression to their ideas and feelings on different parts of the body of their sweet-heart especially the breasts, belly, waist, thighs and ankles unheard of earlier. Unlike a respectable female sweet-heart in whose love, the poet had to pine and was prepared to die, the courtesan was easily available for sex. That is why in Urdu ghazal, masnavi and vasokht of those days, we come across allusions to sex act itself. True, some of the verses written in those days, can be considered indecent and even pronographic but let us not forget that they represented the general decline in morals in that period.

These women also formed the central theme of a peculiar type of poetry called Rekhti already described in the preceding chapter in which the male poet used feminine language of courtesans and the like to give expression to their supposed thoughts.

The courtesans obtained recognition in society as sozkhwan and nauhakhwan. Many of them were employed by members of the royal family and nobility to chant dirges. Many of the courtesans held their own Majlises which were largely attended. Whenever Hasso, Chaudharain sisters, Bari Jaddan and Kallan recited marsiya or nauha, large gatherings collected to hear them.[68]

Mohazzab Lakhnavi now in early seventies, speaks highly of Babban twaif as a nauha singer whom he saw in her old age.[69] Many courtesans used to accompany their tazias when taken out for burial and recite nauhas as already mentioned.

The courtesans were also very fond of visiting Shia religious shrines like Dargah Hazrat Abbas and various Karbalas. In Karbala Talkatora, they used to pitch their tents and stay for days together. No wonder, many people visited the shrines and Karbalas to have rendezvous with them.

When Wajid Ali Shah was the crown prince, he arranged a visit of his fairies to Dargah Hazrat Abbas. To quote him,[70] 'the eyes of people in the bazar and the Dargah were glued on them (fairies). The same night Haider Husain Khan had a quarrel at the dargah due to nazzarabazi. But Mir Mohammad Mahdi restored order. After a pahar of night, all these persons returned to the palace from the Dargah safely. They expressed their gratitude to me but hearing this Hazrat Jannat Maken (King Amjad Ali Shah), became displeased and furious. He rebuked and cautioned me.'

The courtesans also participated in the fairs held in and around Lucknow. Here are two lines by Insha :

I don't know which fair is being held today, please enquire,
As crowded dolies are passing one after another.

In the eighteenth century, dolis were usually used by courtesans.

The courtesans were invariably invited by royalty, nobility and gentry for singing and dancing sessions on happy occasions like birth-days, marriages and coronation.

It is thus amply clear that the courtesan performed an important role in the culture of old Lucknow and occupied a somewhat respectable position in the society. She was well read and well informed and was a good conversationalist. She was more than a combination of the modern dancing girl and the call girl. Her presence was considered necessary in important social gatherings, functions and darbars held by both major and minor nobles. She conducted herself with elegance and dignity. As a matter of fact, the courtesan became a necessary ingredient of the decadent culture of the last days of the Muslim rule in India. However, the respectability attained by the courtesan, was a special feature of Lucknow. Adoption of the religion of the rulers by most of courtesans who then participated in religious and semi-religious gatherings, social functions and rituals without any taboo whatsoever and their artistic and literary talents were the main reasons which enabled the courtesans of Lucknow to occupy a privileged position in the social set up of Avadh. That in the process, the courtesans adversely affected the position of women as a whole under the Nawabi rule, is a different story.

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7

THE WORLD OF WOMEN

The courtesans are a misfortune, though
The begums are a disaster, all the more.

—Shauq

In the feudal society of Avadh, the women did not possess many rights. Plurality of wives and concubinage being order of the day, they were not able to have much claims on their husbands. Their life was confined within the four walls of the Zenana where strict purdah was observed. However, despite the restrictions, life was fairly comfortable. And within the Zenana, it was the rule of the women by the women and for the women. Not only this, those who were in good books of their men, were able to exercise great influence over them and get things done according to their wish.

In order to understand the role of women especially those belonging to royalty, nobility or gentry, it would be worthwhile to study the living condition in the Zenana and haramsera and the life style of the inmates in their private apartments, which were of considerable public interest in view of important positions occupied by some of these ladies in the life of their husbands or masters, and also because of the large number of people, both men and women who depended directly or indirectly on the haramsera for their subsistence.

The Haramsera

The building where the women of the royal or noble families lived, was called haramsera. Among the gentry and sometimes even among the nobility, it was called Zenana (female quarters). Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali gives us a fairly good idea of the Zenana. It consisted of a quadrangle on three sides of which, lay habitable apartments and the fourth side was occupied by the kitchen and lumber rooms etc. A line or sometimes two lines of pillars, formed the front of the building which had no upper room. The walls had no windows. The building was divided into halls. The extreme corner had dark rooms fitted with doors used for keeping stores or valuables. No doors were fixed anywhere else. The floors were made from beaten earth, bricks or stones. In the absence of doors in the halls, privacy was secured by means of thick wadded curtains of course calico or woollen cloth to fit each opening between the pillars. Along with the curtains, chilmans or chiqs i.e. blinds neatly made from bamboo strips woven together with coloured cards, were hung. These were coloured green or in any other gaudy colour.[1]

The seating arrangements were made on the floor which was first matted with coarse date leaf mattings over which was spread a shatrangi (thick cotton carpets woven in stripes of black and white or shades of blue). The shatrangi too was covered with a white calico carpet. The masnad carpet was placed in the centre of the hall, preferably near a pillar. These carpets were made of many varieties of fabrics, gold cloth, quilted silk, brocaded silk, fine chintz, etc. The masnad was placed on this carpet. It was covered with gold cloth, silk, velvet or calico with square pillows to correspond for the elbow, knees etc. The place of honour was occupied by the mistress of the house. She, however, politely offered her seat to a superior visitor to the Zenana and took her seat near the edge of the carpet.[2]

For sleeping, bed-steads were used. The legs of these bedsteads were, in some instances, made of gold, silver or silver gilt. Others had enamelled painting on fine wood. Matresses were seldom used. A soojinee (sozni, an embroidered quilt) was spread on the bed and it was covered with calico sheet tied at each corner of the bed with cords and tassels. A number of thin flat pillows of beaten cotton were used for the head. To cover the body, a muslin sheet drung summer and a well padded razai made of silk or chintz and bound with silver ribands and sometimes bordered with gold brocaded trimming during winter, were used.[3]

Looking glasses and ornamented furnitures were rarely found in the Zenana. Chairs and sofas were put up only when European ladies were expected. Meals were served on dastarkhwans spread on the floor.[4]

As the ladies had enough time to spare, they played a number of indoor games. Their favourite pastime was a game of chance with dice called Chowsah (four sides) or chhausah (six sides). They also liked to play Pachisi which was played on chequered cloth carpets with red and ivory cones. They also played many indescribable games with circular cards, six suits to a pack very neatly painted.[5] This appears to be a description of the game called ganjifa. Shampooing was yet another device to while away time. Persons of rank were shampooed by their slaves during the hours of sleep, day or night. Female story tellers were employed to entertain their mistresses with stories and tales many of which were derived from the Arabian Nights, one story begetting another.[6]

When Hakim Mahdi was living in exile in Qanauj, Fanny Parkes visited his Zenana. According to her, the rooms in the zenana of the Hakim, which was occupied by his wife who was a slave to his dead begum, were long and narrow and supported by pillars on the side which faced the garden of the haramsera, in which golden fish were swimming about. It had also three fountains. The begum kept some beautiful pigeons which were fed near the fountains.[7]

The above description covers Zenana of fairly high classes but not of royalty. Let us now try to peep in the inner apartments of nawabs of Avadh.

Faiz Bux tells us that Sadr-i-Jahan Begum wife of Safdar Jung, the second Nawab, lived in Moti Bagh situated in the middle of Faizabad town.[8] As Safdar Jung lived a simple soldier's life, the begums's mahalsera too was a simple one in his life time. Later it expanded considerably as she had to manage her jagir herself after the death of her husband. Bahu Begum, the Chief consort of Shujauddaulah, lived in Moti Mahal, situated inside the fort in Faizabad. The walls of the mahalsera were very high, being more than twelve cubits high. To reach the Begum, one had to pass through at least three gates closely guarded.[9] The innermost door was locked both from inside and outside. As chief begum of Shujauddaulah, Bahu Begum lived in style separate from the Nawab's other secondary wives and mistresses whose residences were humorously termed by her as Chor Mahal[10] (Thieve's Palace) as out of respect for the begum, the Nawab visited them only clandestinely.

The Zenana of Saadat Ali Khan's mother was located in a handsome building but it had a most melancholy appearance. There she lived along with her unmarried daughters, some of whom were upwards of forty years old.[11]

The haramsera from the days of Saadat Ali Khan till the reign of Amjad Ali Shah, was located adjacent to the eastern portion of Farrah Bux Palace, the chief royal residenee, situated on the present site of Chhattar Manzil. The haramsera had a number of buildings under different names like Sheesh Mahal, Khurd Mahal and Rang Mahal. Each building was square in shape. Each side had large rectangular or square rooms with a verandah in front followed by a chabutara. The rooms had no doors but heavy curtains were hung for privacy. There were also underground rooms beneath these rooms called tahkhanas which were usually used during summers, being cool. Each building had a large courtyard which was beautified with small but nicely laid gardens and fountains. The building, however, did not have any windows opening outside but it had one or more closely guarded gates.[12]

The Farrah Bux complex and the attached haramsera with such additions and alterations as were considered necessary, were used as residence by succeeding rulers ending with Amjad Ali Shah. Wajid Ali Shah built the Qaiserbagh buildings between 1848-1850 at a cost of eighty lacs of rupees. Now only the rear portion remains. Other parts were destroyed during the Freedom Struggle or demolished later under city's development plans.

It would be worthwhile to have a complete picture of Qaiserbagh complex. On the north western side of the Qaiserbagh was Jilokhana (Front Hall). Its courtyard was used for preparations in connection with royal processions. Adjacent to this maidan, was the Chinibagh. On turning left, one passed through Jalpari, the Mermaid Gate. On one side of this gate was Hazratganj and on the right of this garden was located Chandi Wali

Baradari, the Silver House. The next building was Khas Muqam (the Main Spot) where Wajid Ali Shah himself lived and adjacent to Khas Muqam was Badshah Manzil built by Nawab Saadat Ali Khan but included by Wajid Ali Shah in his scheme of Qaiserbagh complex. On the right of these residences, were the set of buildings built by Azimullah Khan, the royal barber who sold them to Wajid Ali Shah for four lacs of rupees, hence called Chaulakhi. Here lived Nawab Khas Mahal, King's principal wife and some other important begums. Nawab Hazrat Mahal later used the building and held court there in 1857-58. A little farther was a huge shady tree around which a marble platform had been built. It was on this platform that Wajid Ali Shah used to sit clad in saffron clothes during the famous Qaiserbagh fairs. In front of this platform was Lakhi Darwaza so called because a lac of rupees was spent on its erection. Going through this gate, one came to the Qaiserbagh proper, an enclosure of two storied residences which constituted the main mahalsera of Wajid Ali Shah, housing a large number of his wives—begums and mamtuas both.[13]

An annual fair was held in August when the towns-folk could go and see the Qaiserbagh and have a glimpse of the mahalsera.[14]

West of Lakhi Darwaza lay the palace of Roshan uddaulah, which was confiscated to the State by Wajid Ali Shah, renamed Qaiser Pas and given to Nawab Mashuq Mahal to be used as her residence.[15]

While majority of the King's women lived in a common Mahalsera, principal begums and for the time being favourite women, lived in separate houses with separate kitchens and in comforts of seclusion. Malka Kishwar, the principal begum of Amjad Ali Shah, lived in Chhattar Manzil, Chaulakhi Kothi and the Kothi in the garden of Dwarka Das in rotation, depending on weather.[16] Wajid Ali Shah constructed Sikandar Bagh after the name of his favourite begum, Sikandar Mahal, at a cost of five lacs of rupees near Shah Najaf for her residence.[17]

Watch and Ward

The Nawabi haramseras were well guarded, Nawab Sadr-e-Jahan's Palace was watched by 400 sepoys.[18] Bahu Begum's Moti Mahal was guarded by a Mewati regiment of 150 men day and night. We learn from Faiz Bux that fifty Mewatis under the command of a subaltern walked armed the mahalsera playing cymbals. Inside the inner door, were posted big and fat Kashmiri women to keep strict vigil. Inside the harem, about twenty-five eunuchs were appointed as guards. Bahu Begum's bed room was jealously guarded by four Mughal women who watched in shifts. Whoever dared to enter the Palace after the first ghari in night, was immediately arrested.[19] Her Palace was so well guarded that when Asafuddaula decided to coerce her to yield money to pay the Company's dues, he had to despatch troops and guns and could capture her fort only after resistance offered by the Begum's men who numbered three or four thousand, according to Abu Talib.[20] Similarly when Badshah Begum, fell out with her step son and the ruler of the day, Nasiruddin Haider, she recruited a large number of soldiers, to guard her palace. It was only after a well organized siege with English support that the King was able to make most of the Begum's men desert her and force her to leave the palace. When she was leaving the palace for Almas bagh outside the city, a scuffle started between her men and the royal army. There was exchange of fire and four of her Abyssinian slave girls were shot dead and the King's army too suffered some losses.[21] At Almas Bagh, the Begum again recruited a large number of men under Imam Bux, a bhishti. Their number was stated to be about 5,000 with three pieces of artillery of small calibre. As Nasiruddin Haider was not able to contain her, so he asked for British help on the basis of a treaty which bound the British to help the King against internal and external enemies. It was only on the intervention of the English that Badshah Begum withdrew her forces and paid off some of the men.[22] On the death of Nasiruddin Haider as is well known, she unsuccessfully tried to put Munajan on the throne with the help of troops.

Sadr-i-Jahan Begum, Bahu Begum and Badshah Begum outlived their husbands and even some of their successors. Because of large jagirs they held and because of their prestige and popularity among the people, they did not consider themselves subservient to the rulers who succeeded their husbands and did not hesitate to defy their authority when an occasion arose.

With Badshah Begum however, ended the era of maintenance of private armies by begums but the haramsera continued to be apparently well guarded usually by female soldiers and khwajaseras i.e. male eunuchs. Female soldiers were dressed like their male counterparts in jackets, white duck trousers and cross belts. They carried cartridge boxes, muskets and bayonets. They appeared efficient and well drilled, their only disadvantage being their constant indulgence in unmilitary pregnancy.[23] According to Knighton there were two companies of female sepoys who had their own corporals and sergeants.[24] Wajid Ali Shah employed thirty female Turks on the watch and ward duty of his mahalsera. He himself imparted them military training. Mohammad Sharif Ali Khan an eunuch was put in command of this contingent.[25] Despite these elaborate arrangements of watch and ward, the Nawabs were not able to prevent affairs between some of the inmates of the harem and their lovers outside. We will dilate on this subject later.

Role of Eunuchs

Every mahalsera had a number of eunuchs employed inside and outside the mahalsera to perform all sorts of jobs. In fact, they were the only class of servants who were allowed free and unfettered movement inside and outside the harem. Many of them had won confidence of their mistresses and masters and rose to occupy high positions. In view of their important and almost all pervading role inside and outside the mahalsera, it would be of interest to examine the institution of khwajaseras in some detail.

According to Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, the eunuchs came from the class of persons who had been stolen from their parents in their infancy by bad characters who later sold them, when they were still children to rich families, who adopted them and brought them up as their slaves.[26] Their main privilege which was denied to other male slaves and servants was that they were admitted in the zenana at all hours.[27] Usually they were sincere and devoted to their owners and could be trusted in confidential matters with the result many of them were entrusted by their masters and mistresses with responsible and confidential jobs.

Till the days of Nasiruddin Haider, the eunuchs not only controlled the haramsera but also managed the jagirs of their Begums and played a role in the political affairs of their times. They also acquired property and riches but because they were slaves, their property reverted to their owners on their death.[28] No wonder in case of some rich khwajaseras, the Nawabs used to anxiously watch for their deaths in order to reclaim their wealth and property.

Sadr-i-Jahan Begum and Bahu Begum employed a large number of eunuchs to manage their haramseras and also their jagirs. Muharram Ali Khan, was the Nawab Nazir of Sadr-i-Jahan Begum. Matbuh Ali Khan, Iltifat Ali Khan, Javed Ali Khan, Mian Bahryab, Sukhanfahm, Mian Dana, Bakhtawar and Tezhosh were other important Khawajaseras who were employed by her within and outside the palace. After her death, Muharram Ali Khan and Matbuh Ali Khan were taken to Lucknow and tortured to reveal the so called hidden wealth of the dead lady. They were released only after confiscation of their personal property.[29] The eunuchs had their hey day in the life time of Bahu Begum. Almost the entire management of her palace and estates was in the hands of the eunuchs. Jawahar Ali Khan and later Darab Ali Khan were her nawab nazirs and also held responsible positions as administrators of her jagirs.[30] Jawahar Ali Khan was authorised by Bahu Begum to make appointments, order dismissals and sanction leases after obtaining her approval. He had 8,000 to 10,000 employees of different categories under him. Darab Ali Khan was her treasurer, envoy and incharge of her jagir in Tanda and Nawabganj.[31] Jawahar Ali Khan and Bahar Ali Khan were greatly tortured and humiliated by Asafuddaulah's men when he was trying to extract money from her mother with English connivance. Other important Khwajaseras of Bahu Begum employed within the harem and also assigned duties outside the mahalsera included Mian Idrak, Firasat, Aqalmand, Yaqut Khan, Mian Khurram, Mian Taib, Khurshed, Sakhawat, Zamarrud, Zulfiquar Mian, Daulat and Ishrat.[32]

One of the most prominent eunuchs of the period was Almas Ali Khan. He was a trusted Khwajasera of Shujauddaulah and was incharge of revenue collection of the District of Miyanganj for 40 years. He was instrumental in appointment of Haider Beg Khan as minister but later fell out with him and made unsuccessful attempts to dislodge him. Afterwards he along with others, successfully connived with the English in the removal of Wazir Ali as ruler of Avadh on grounds of illegitimacy. No wonder Almas Ali Khan became a favourite of the British. According to Sleeman, Almas Ali Khan was "the greatest and the best man of any note that Oude has produced".[33] According to Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, he was a man of great attainments and gifted with a remarkably superior mind.[34] He seems to have remained important in the period of Saadat Ali Khan despite his old age.

When George Viscount Valentia visited Lucknow in 1802 or shortly afterwards he was invited by Almas Ali Khan for breakfast and was entertained with a nautch and mimics. The King was, however, anxiously waiting for his death because being a slave, on his death, his estate was to be reverted to the Crown.[35]

Almas Ali Khan also patronized poets. Insha a famous poet of that period was very close to him and he also wrote a qasida extolling Almas Ali Khan.[36]

Another important eunuch mentioned by Mrs Meer Hasan Ali is Afrin Khan who according to Faiz Bux, carried on negotiations between Bahu Begum and Asafuddaulah when he was coercing her to yield money to him.[37]

The eunuchs continued to flourish in the reigns of Ghaziuddin Haider and Nasiruddin Haider. In their days, the chief eunuch was stationed at the deorh of Badshah Begum and commanded great respect. Whenever she went out ceremoniously, she was followed by him riding on an elephant and seated in a gold howdah. A number of eunuchs who distributed charity to beggars, also formed part of the procession.[38]

After Nasiruddin Haider, the eunuchs lost their importance and their number too dwindled. Malka Kishwar particularly did not like the institution and utilized eunuchs for public ceremonies and processions only.[39] During the period of Wajid Ali Shah, however the eunuchs staged a comeback and occupied important positions in and outside the haramsera. Two eunuchs, Feroz and Bashir who were appointed Darogha-e-Niyamat Khana and Darogha-e-Nazarat respectively when Wajid Ali Shah was the Crown Prince. When Najmunnisa Begum, darogha of his haramsera died, Umrao Begum succeeded her but she was holding her office only in name. The real power was exercised by Mohammad Sharif Ali Khan, an eunuch.[40] Wajid Ali Shah appointed Ahsan-ud-daulah, a Negro as commander of Khaqani and Sulaimani platoons, Husain Ali Khan alias Muatmad Ali Khan was commander of two platoons named Banke and Tirchhe. He was also one of the superintendents of construction of Sikanderbagh. Bashir Ali Khan, a negro who was in the service of the nawab since the days of Ghaziuddin Haider, was given charge of royal haramsera.[41]

Col. Sleeman writing in 1849, remarked that the doms, singers and eunuchs were virtual rulers of Avadh.[42] His statement may be disputed but the fact remains that the eunuchs who were mainly meant for harem duties, came to play important roles in administrative matters and political affairs concerning their mentors, masters and mistresses.

Harem Establishment

Besides watch and ward personnnel and eunuchs, the haramsera had a large retinue of servants and officials to perform the various jobs from outside to run the establishment of the harem smoothly. People were employed to look after accounts, purchases, stables, coach houses and elephant stalls. Physicians, maulvis, and astrologers were also attached to the harem. In case of important begums having jagirs or regular income from other sources, several officials to deal with revenue matters were also included in the establishment. Sadr-i-Jahan Begum had nearly 1,000 persons on her payroll included heads of offices, bankers, assayers, treasurers, superintendents of carriage houses, elephants' stalls,[43] etc. Bahu Begum who lived like a monarch and had a small kingdom of her own in the shape of her jagirs, presided over a vast establishment in which the khwaja-seras enjoyed top positions. According to Faiz Bux, about a lac of people depended on her directly or indirectly. She paid her servants regularly month by month even in advance without any deduction.[44] Besides recruiting a large number of guards to defend her mahalsera from Nasiruddin Haider's men and to protect her and Munajan's interest, Badshah Begum had a large establishment to perform duties connected with her palace and jagirs, as well as political affairs and numerous religious ceremonies which she conducted throughout the year. In her case too, top positions were occupied by eunuchs. Later Begums, however, did not have establishments of such large sizes because they could not rise to wield the political power enjoyed by the abovementioned three grand old ladies. But important among them having large jagirs had fairly large establishments. Qudsia Begum, a favourite wife of Nasiruddin Haider, for instance, had a Nawab Nazir, a physician, a darogha deorhi, an ataliq (teacher) for her son from her previous husband and a large number of other persons on her payroll. The ataliq was, interestingly, Syed Kamaluddin Haider, the author of the famous history of the period, Qaisar-ul-Twarikh.[45]

Let us now have an idea of the retinue of attendants employed inside the harem.

There was a female darogha or chief Mughlani to control the harem from inside and a khwaja sera to manage it from outside.[46] Foremost among the serving classes engaged in the harem, were kaniz or bandi i.e. slave girls. Some of them were hereditary slaves while others were purchased from poor families. There were yet girls who were abducted from families, by professional traffickers or dacoits and then sold to serve as bandi as already described.[47] Some of them found their way to the haremsera, because of their beautiful faces and qualities of singing, story-telling, shampooing etc.[48] The begums who came from noble families too brought a dowry of slave girls. In fact, slave girls were considered to be necessary appendages to the rank and respectability of a family.[49] Slave girls were treated as a property and as such if the master happened to be a male, he could have sex relations with them without the formality of marriage. Wajid Ali Shah, for instance, received six slave girls from his father and kept two of them namely Farkhunda Bux and Shah Bux for his pleasure. When Farkhunda Bux gave birth to a girl, she was admitted to the class of 'asamian' but she could not become a begum because the girl later died.[50]

The rules of Avadh occasionally carried on affairs with even married slave girls and female attendants of their begums. Qudsia Begum, who rose to be a favourite wife of Nasiruddin Haider, was an attendant of Malka Zamania.[51] Malka Kishwar got the face of one of her maid servants burnt because she had found that her husband, Amjad Ali Shah was having an affair with her. Nawab Anju Begum, a wife of Wajid Ali Shah was an attendant of his principal wife, Nawab Khas Mahal.[52]

Another class of attendants, was the Kahari or the female bearer. The kaharis carried palanquins and other conveyances of the king and his ladies into the inner-courts of the harem. They had their commissioned and non-commissioned officers.[53]

The ladies of the royal and noble families possessed a number of Khawses (paid companions). In some of the royal families 200 to 300 companions were employed. Usually each lady of means had two to ten companions in addition to the posse of slaves and domestics. "A well filled zenana is a mark of gentility and even the poorest lady in the country will retain a number of slaves and domestics, if she cannot afford a companion," observes Mrs Meer Hasan Ali.[54]

The following is a list of the women employed in the haremsera to perform specified jobs.[55]

Mahaldar. She was a harbinger and carrier of messages from the deorhi to inside of the mahalsera.

Mehri. She performed routine jobs of various types as directed by the mistress.

Pesh Khidmat. She remained in attendance ready to convey orders to the concerned person.

Mughlani. She was employed mainly for sewing.

Chitthinavis (letter writer) : She did the writing work of the ladies and functioned as their friend, guide and philosopher.

Dastango (Story teller) : Her job was to tell stories for the recreation of the inmates of the harem.

Tosha Khana Wali : She was in charge of stores and godowns.

Mashshata : She was employed to dress ladies.

Dai : She was the serving maid who came with the bride as her personal attendant.

Asils : Maid servants usually employed for kitchen service.

To assist the ladies in religious matters and to recite dirges, Hadis Khwan (reciter of hadis), Marsiya Khwan (reciter of marsiya), Soz Khwan (reciter of soz), and Nauha Khawn (reciter of nauha) were kept on the rolls of the harem.

To look after a baby, the following classes of maid servants were employed.

Anna : She was employed to feed the baby as the ladies of royal and noble families, did not like to fatigue themselves with the infant by feeding it from their own breasts.[56]

The annas were employed for life unless they chose to leave of their own accord.

Khelai : Her job was to play with the baby and keep it in good humour.

Dada : The female slave who brought up a child, *Chhuchu* : She cleaned the baby and washed its face. She was usually of young age and also functioned as a companion.

Bubu : An old slave woman who had worked as chhuchu for elders.

Dadaju : She taught the baby to talk.

Sukhni : A daughter of a serving woman working in the haramsera employed as a companion to a Begum's daughter.

Atu : Her job was to impart education to girls and teach them manners and etiquette.[57]

In his Masnavi Sahr-ul-Bayan, Meer Hasan who lived in the days of Asaf-ud-Daullah, describes the life and types of the female servants employed in the palace.

Dadas, dais and mughlanis
Moved about shedding lustre,
O' what a crowd of khwases and slaves
The pranks of the palace, the rejoicings among them.
Crowds of pretty slaves everywhere
Someone named Chameli, another Raibel
Someone named Rangili, another Shyamroop
Someone named Chitlagan, another Kamroop
Someone named Ketki, another Gulab
Someone named Mehrtan, another Mahtab
They came and went hither and thither
They moved about showing their bloom
Someone is smoking hookah
Another subsisting on promises of love
Someone is minding her parrot
Another is having an eye on her mynah
Someone, placing the arsi in front
Combing her hair conquettishly
Someone, opening her toilet box to set
Layers of missi on her lips.

During the days of Nasiruddin Haider, a class of female entertainers called Jalse Walian became an integral part of the harem. His harem was full of women and there were women everywhere. However, his successor, Mohammad Ali Shah got rid of most of the Jalse Walian and enforced discipline in the harem.

During the reign of Amjad Ali Shah, the harem was better managed, thanks to his principal begum, Malka Kishwar. The number and types of serving women entering the haremsera, were restricted and eunuchs were used only for ceremonial occasions and processions. Female soldiers were however, continued to be employed.[58]

With the establishment of the Parikhana and Wajid Ali Shah's desire to have a large number of women around himself, the number of inmates of the harem, considerably increased and the atmosphere prevailing in his harem resembled that of Nasiruddin's harem.

We get interesting facts about the harem from Wajid Ali Shah himself. Among the categories of attendants employed in the mahal-sera, he mentions as-a-mian, doliwalian, gane walian (female singers), marsiya khwan, kahari, mehri, khwas and khwajasera.

Najmunnisa Begum, a relation of Nawab Khas Mahal, was the darogha of his harem when Wajid Ali Shah was the Crown Prince.[59]

To please Wajid Ali Shah, many of the begums used to present or suggest beautiful girls to him. Amir Pari entered the harem on the initiative of Nawab Nishat Mahal. Wazir Pari, Shah Bux and Altaf Bux owed their entry into the palace to Nawab Khas Mahal, though she did this most reluctantly for her survival. To quote Wajid Ali Shah, "As she (Nawab Khas Mahal) was wise and intelligent, she understood it well that her purpose would not be served unless she obeyed me and carried out my orders. Therefore, she started sending women to serve me clandestinely.[60]

In addition to various types of women employed in the haremsera, a large number of women visited it everyday to perform various menial occupations and jobs, to sell merchandise of various types or to carry out intrigues. Some of them caught the eye of the rulers to become their favourite concubines or even wives. For instance, one of the wives of Amjad Ali Shah was a green groceress who used to visit the mahalsera to sell vegetables.[61]

Life in the Harem

Fairly detailed accounts of life of inmates in the harem of nawabs of Avadh, have been handed over to us by foreign travellers of the day, contemporary writers and poets as well as Wajid Ali Shah, last ruler of Avadh.

Nawab Sader-i-Jahan Begum's personal life was simple but wherever she went out, she was always escorted by a large retinue of guards and eunuchs. She was very religious and said her prayers regularly. She fasted for there months in a year.[62]

Faiz Bux gives us an inkling of the life style of Bahu Begum who lived like a reigning queen even after the death of her husband. The secondary wives and mistresses of Shujauddaulah were not allowed to enter her haremsera. Even their names were not permitted to be mentioned in her presence. It was only after Shujauddaulah's death that some of them were permitted to see her or allowed to accompany her when she took a stroll in the gardens or went out on a visit. Most of them could not sit down in her presence. Only a few, considered more respectable than others, were permitted to sit behind her beyond the carpet on which she was sitting. It was a rude shock to her when on becoming ruler of Avadh, Saadat Ali Khan equated his mother, Khurd Mahal, with Bahu Begum. But Bahu Begum refused her and her retinue to pass through her residence at Brij Tiloi.[63] In his lifetime Shujauddaulah used to take both the meals and also spend the night at her palace. After her husband's death, she gradually adopted a simple and austere living. She took only one meal per day and slept on a bare ebony bed.[64]

While Sadr-i-Jaham Begum and Bahu Begum lived at Faizabad, Shamshunnisa Begum, wife of Asafuddaulah lived in Lucknow residing in the Machhi Bhawan Fort. Valentia visited her mahalsera along with Col. Scott during the rule of Saadat Ali Khan. They were received by her nephew. "We were at a very small distance from her but the thick purdah gave us no hopes of a feel. The usual messages were carried by the eunuchs."[65]

The same traveller also visited the haramsera of Saadat Ali Khan's mother. After sitting a proper time presents were exchanged. Valentia was presented two shawls by the old lady. From there, he was taken to a tent close to the haramsera where the Nawab occasionally slept.[66]

While the accounts left by male chronicles do not, for obvious reasons give a picture of the inside of the Zenana, they nevertheless, point out that the male Europeans were admitted to the haramsera to a certain point.

Badshah Begum, the Chief Consort of Ghaziuddin Haider, was in absolute control of her haramsera and did not allow her step son, Nasiruddin Haider to interfere in her management. In fact, she successfully managed to keep her husband, Ghaziuddin Haider and later Nasiruddin Haider completely dark about the goings on in the harem. For instance, the facts regarding Munajan's parentage could not be fully ascertained because of obscurity surrounding the entry of his mother in the zenana of Badshah Begum.

Badshah Begum enjoyed many privileges and mark of royal distinction. When she went out her carriage was preceded by a dankah (kettle drum). She also used embroidered Chattah (Embrella), the aftaba (embroidered sun) and chowries of the peacock feathers whose usage was reserved only for the royal ladies.[67]

Mrs Meer Hasan Ali has given a graphic description of the procession of Badshah Begum when she visited the dargah of Hazarat Abbas.

The procession was headed by a guard of cavalry soldiers with their colours, followed by two battalions of infantry with music bands and a company of spearsmen on foot dressed white with turbans on. Next in the procession was a band of music drums, fifes, etc. Then came the important dandah, the drum beaters announcing to the public the rank of the begum. The dankah was followed by the main attraction of the procession i.e. the carriage of the queen called Chandola which was like a silver room (6′ x 5′ x 4′)

supported by four poles and carried on the shoulders of twenty bearers clothed in scarlet loose coats embroidered with gold with turbans of matching colour on their heads, who were changed every quarter of a mile. The carriage was surrounded by women bearers who carried the chandola within the compound of private apartments. Chobdars and Sotabardars walked near the carriage, carrying gold or silver staffs and wands. The queen was followed by her Chief Eunuch on an elephant. Ladies of quality in covered palanquins, officers of the Queen household on elephants and lastly women of inferior rank and female slaves in raths drawn by bullocks.[68] Mrs Meer Hasan Ali counted 50 such carriages having four to six females each. The passengers were the staff of the Zenana such as companions, readers of the Kuran, Khwasses, etc.[69] The procession took almost half an hour to pass through the house where Mrs. Ali lived.[70]

Fanny Parkes gives us an insight of the harem of Nasiruddin Haider. The ladies were superbly dressed, looking like elves and fairies. They were mostly brunette with large languishing black eyes made blacker with the pencilled line of black drawn over the edges of the eyelids. The eyebrows were carefully tended to look like a semi circle. They wore a kurtie (shirt) to cover the upper portion of the body which, being made of thread net, revealed more and hid less. The begums used gaudily coloured pyjamas usually made of satin, cloth of gold or silk, which sometimes extended like a train and were confined by a broad ribbon of gold or silver tissue at the waist, the ends of which hung down before terminating in rich tassels which reached below the knee. Jewels and pearls were freely used on these tassels The pyjamas were fuller below the knee than above, becoming tighter and tighter, until they fitted closely to the figure at the waist to which they were tied with a waist band, rich ornaments of which, were visible to the eye through the Kurties. A dupatta, a sheet of fine cloth, usually made of fine muslin of Dacca, covered with beautiful embroidery and ornamented with rich bullion fringes, was used to cover the upper portion of the body.[71]

Fanny Parkes visited Taj Mahal, one of the begums of Nasiruddin Haider, when she happened to be in his very good books. She wore a dress of gold and scarlet brocade strewed with pearls which hung down upon her neck in long single strings terminating in large pearls which mixed with a hung as low as her hair which was curled on each side of her head in long ringlets like Charles, the Second's beauties. She wore a small gold cird-let from which hung large pear shaped pearls interspersed with emeralds. She wore immense gold rings with pearls and emeralds suspended all around in long strings. Her nose-ring too had large round pearls and emeralds. Fanny Parkes noticed that Taj Mahal, wore long sleeves open at the elbow and her dress was full petticoat some dozens yard wide with a tight bodice attached and only open at the throat. She had several persons to bear her train when she travelled, and her women stood behind her coach to arrange her head-dress when in moving, her pearls got entangled in the immense dupatta of scarlet and gold, she had thrown around her.[72]

Fanny Parkes also learnt that Taj Mahal had taken to drinking and the King's drinking bouts were held at her palace.[73]

About Mukhandra Alia, an European wife of Nasiruddin, she says that she wrote and spoke Persian language fluently. When Fanny spoke to her in English, the queen told her that she had forgotten the language. She was chewing pan "with all the gusto of a regular Hindustanee."[74]

Knighton has left for us a record of the harem of Malka Kishwar, wife of Amjad Ali Shah. As the begum herself led a virtuous and religious life, the herem life in her day was, to a certain extent, free from the vulgarity and obscenity of the days of Nasiruddin Haider.[75]

The queen enjoyed to hear stories which were meant either to entertain her or to induce her to sleep. Many female story tellers were employed for this job. The queen liked to hear stories about Amir Hamza, Abbas, the Standard Bearer, court of Indra, royalty, dervishes and the like. She was also fond of massage. Many clever shampooers were employed to massage her limbs. She also used to take an energetic and vigorous bath keeping the attendants busy for almost the whole day. Besan was applied generously on the body which was then washed with warm water. This was done again and again, twenty times or so. Pitchers of warm and cold water were kept ready for the bath.[76]

The queen's food was cooked in her own kitchen. Her breakfast consisted of roughani tikia and balai (cream). During summers, a cooling drink made up from conserves and diluted pearls, was served to her before lunch. She took dinner after sunset. It was a lavish and elaborate affair. The menu consisted of twenty to thirty items, among them being two or three types of pulao, several kinds of qurmah, kababs, strong broths of meat, vegetables, dates and sweets. She used spoons to eat her food. It was her habit to have a puff at her hookah after meals.[77]

Wajid Ali Shah himself gives a frank and vivid account of his harem in his Persian book Tarkikh-e-Parikhan (History of the Fairy house) already quoted in this book. His relations with his principal wife, Nawab Khas Mahal were quite strained because of his liaison and flirtations with the female employees of the mahalsera. Many kaharis, mehris and khwases were able to win Wajid Ali Shah's favours and were suitably rewarded. We find that his harem was full of many undesirable persons. He mentions in his book, how he had to turn out one of his paris because she had stolen the amulets in caskets of gold and silver belonging to his son, Mirza Falak Quadar Bahadur.[78] He goes to describe acute rivalries between his wives and his utter helplessness to control them.[79] They did not care for him when he was afflicted with syphilis. "During my illness Mahaboobai Alam and Khausru Begum along with Qaiser Begum went away to Jalaluddaulah House gifted by me for recreation and left me in the hands of the hakims. Hidden from me, these persons enjoy the pleasures of the world and because of my disease, I cannot interfere."[80] Ganjifa was the most popular game in the harem of Wajid Ali Shah.

Golden Cage

Many of the women procured for the nawabs and princes of Avadh who came from poor families or professional classes, were not in the harem by their choice. Most of them remained in royal favour only for short spells and then were consigned to oblivion. Although they were provided with all possible physical comforts and literally rolled in luxury, many of them were unhappy in their golden cage and longed to return to their commoner's life despite the poverty and squalor inherent in such a life. After the death of Nasiruddin Haider, many inmates of his harem, left the haremsera to live a life of their own spurning wealth and comforts of the haremsera as already mentioned. Similarly despite grand gala treatment accorded by Wajid Ali Shah, several of his mamtuas and wives deserted him.[81] When he was a crown prince, eighteen beautiful women known as Huzoor walian who were in his keeping, ultimately managed to get away from him.[82] Obviously fed up with harem life, some of his paris went on pilgrimage to Karbala.[83] Nawab Saltanat Mahal and Nawab Safaraz Mahal who were members of the Parikhana and later upgraded as mahals preferred to revert to their previous status of paris.[84] They were followed by Khurshed Mahal, Amir Mahal and Ajaib Khanam who gave up pardah and joined the reorganised parikhana. However, later they went back to the harem. In order to find out if his begums were willingly staying with him, Wajid Ali Shah told them in jest "If you all go to your old homes, I will be relieved of a great burden." Hearing this, everyone excepting Umrao Begum, went away in spite of the fact that many musahibs tried to stop them. Although all of them returned sooner or later, Wajid Ali Shah discovered to his sorrow, that neither they loved him nor they were keen to live in his harem. Even after this espisode, Khusru Begum, Gulzar Begum, and Mahboobai Alam wanted to return to their homes. They were ready to forego their status of begums and serve him as twaifs.[85]

What were the reasons which impelled or compelled the royal espouses to spurn and forego the luxury and comforts of the harem and prefer and re-enter a commoner's life? In the first place, many of the girls did not enter the harem of their own free will as they were purchased or manoeuvred into the harem by the king's procurers. Secondly soon after entering the harem, most of the women found that the ruler had no use for them after a few nights of love. When Wajid Ali Shah decided to marry Anju Begum, she chose to be a mamtua because the King had said that if she entered into a muta marriage with him, he would visit her every week but if she wanted nikah, he would visit her only once a year. But Wajid Ali Shah could not keep his word. He himself states thus.[86]

For four days, for me, she waited
But lost was her labour
For I could not go thither.

Then the harem was a large prison guarded by hefty amazons and formidable negro eunuchs. Usually no males with the exception of Khwajasaras and probably physicians had access to them. Most of them were not allowed to have contacts with members of their families and lived a life of forced isolation occasionally disturbed by personal bickerings, jealousies and palace intrigues.

Sex Life

As unsatisfactory sex life was the main cause of dissatisfaction among the inmates of the harem, although because of slack control specially during the days of later nawabs, some of the ladies especially those coming from professional or lowly classes, managed to have clandestine affairs to satisfy their urges. Similarly those begums who had separate houses of their own, got an opportunity to develop contacts and have affairs if they so desired. Asaf-ud-daulah did not bother about enforcing strict morality in his harem. Having reportedly become important later in life and being issueless, he was fond of children. He encouraged pregnant women to enter his harem and adopted the children borne by them. Some of his friends of the lower classes had the entree of his harem and the ugly features and dark complexion of the children are incontrovertible evidenee of their thorough bred descent.[67]

Ghaziuddin Haider's Anglo Indian wife, Mubarak Mahal had a lover in Hakim Banda Mahdi Khan. The character of his other white wife, Sultan Mariam Begum too was not above board as she too had an affair with another hakim.[88]

After the death of a ruler, his women managed to get good deal of personal freedom. Some of the begums, being guaranteed subjects of the British, remained immune from the control of the reigning king. Tajmahal, a widow Nasirrudin Haidar, not only got entangled with Meer Kalbe Hussain, a nephew of Sultan-ul Ullama but also gave birth to an illegitimate daughter. Mukhdra Alia, a white wife of Nasiruddin Haider too conceived three years after his death and died in an attempt to terminate this illegitimate pregnancy.[89] Fed up with frequent complaints, the Resident appointed Mahaldars whose cost was to be borne by begums themselves, to keep a watch on goings on in the kothis of these begums and make a fortnightly report to the Resident. This made the begums desperate and they began 'racing horses of gold and silver'. Ultimately Captain Bird, assistant to the Resident, cancelled the orders and the begums reverted to their former life style.[90]

The control of Wajid Ali Shah on his haremsera, was not very tight and even when he was reigning, some of his begums and mamtuas, were carrying on affairs some of which were in his knowledge and he failed to check them. For instance, Sarfaraz Mahal's liaison with Ghulam Raza, a dhari was well known. She managed to get a divorce from the King on the plea of going on a pilgrimage.[91] Wajid Ali Shah versifies thus :

She took the plea of pilgrimage
All her goods, she sent away
From newsletters I have learnt
She is wandering about in the Christian domain
And is always in contact with Ghulam Raza
Exchanging presents, messages and salaam.

We have it from Wajid Ali Shah himself that loyalty of Mashooqai Khas, Sultanat Mahal, Dildar Mahal, Sikandar Mahal, Amir Mahal, Mashooq Mahal, Nishat Mahal, Umda Begum, Nigar Mahal and Haider Begum towards him was 'of average degree' (whatever it may mean) and the rest of the begums perhaps excluding those from royal or noble families, were faithless.[92] Captain Egerton who visited Lucknow in 1851 during his reign observed that stories of loose morals of ladies in the royal palace, were enough to make one's hair stand on end.[93]

Despite these instances of moral laxity, it needs to be re-emphasized that majority of women in the Nawabi harem were not resourceful enough to have male company and therefore most of them were sexually starved.

Harems of Nobility

Acting on the Persian proverb "Whatever vice pleases the ruler, becomes a virtue", the nobles too adopted the same norms in matters of sex and marriage as the rulers of Avadh. They too maintained harems size of which was dependent on their status and means. Many of them having been upstarts, could stoop to any length to satisfy their urges. Morality of their harems too was of low order. It is said that Roshan-ud-daullah, the vizier of Nasiruddin, used to invite the king to his haremsera where one of his wives, Sarfaraz Mahal, used to entertain him.[94] Despite their powerful influence over the king and his subjects, Shia Ulema were not able to exercise any salutary effect in these matters. As a matter of fact with their sanction and encouragement of muta, they were hardly in a position to do anything to stop the deteriorating status of women. It appears that the Ulema too could not keep themselves aloof from the prevailing practices. Sultan-ul-Ulema had married seven women at one time or another besides having several mamtuas.[95]

It is thus, clear that women were treated as mere sex objects. The wives excepting those whom the husbands were infatuated for the time being, had no say and had no right to stop their husbands from extra-marital sex or even open sex orgies. As a repercussion of this male attitude towards women and inter-mixing of courtesans and family women, laxity of morals was also noticeable among the women at large during the days of later rulers of Avadh. Egerton makes a rather exaggerated and sweeping remark that probably the morals of courtesans of Lucknow were 'not worse than those of majority of Lucknow ladies, morality being rather at a low ebb among the natives of Oudhe'.[96] Although this statement is to be taken with a pinch of salt, we have other sources to show that some of the women of respectable families did carry on affairs. Shauq has to say the following in his masnavi, about the begums.[97]

Courtesans are a misfortune, though
The begums are a disaster, all the more
They disclose not their feelings to everyone, though
Who among them is not unchaste ?
They themselves are in search of affairs, they are beautiful

Libertine they are twice as much as we
Different are their practices from rest of the world
Flattery their nature demands.
Their lives, they'll risk to achieve this
For show is all this refusal
Don't be afraid in your heart.
Have fun with them today
W'en they want pleasure of mating
They 'll rush to you most willingly

The dargahs, karbalas and other religious places used to be the places where pleasure seeking men and women met. To quote Shauq again.

All were sticklers for tradition, though
No Nauchandi was ever missed.
With my friends, I went
Sometimes to the Karbala sometimes to Dargah
We never forgot the function of the thirteenth
And went to Hussainabad in the evening
Folks went there early
And spread farsh at the tank
W'en it was mid-night
There came dolis after dolis
Then warmed up this delightful company
There was no modesty between us
Nights we spent, talking and laughing
And in the morn, we returned home.

Many young women would pretend to be visiting the darghas or karbalas but would go to see their lovers instead.

Here is what Shauq has to say in another masnavi, Zahr-e-Ishq.[98]

To meet me, she arranged thus
To the Dargah, she went every Thursday first
Thence she stole to my house.

He further says :

Then came nauchandi per chance
On this pretext, she came to Dargah
As she was dying for me
Secretly she came to my house thence.

Mushafi says :

With fanfare has came, Nauchandi, you too come, Mushafi.
To Karbala are going the dolis of the lovely ones.

In the post Nawabi period when the families belonging to the gentry were reduced to poverty, some women appear to be visiting Nauchandi fairs to sell their charms.

Jan Sahib says :

The miser demands money on nauchandi from his wife.
Why should she not say then "Let me go out to get money for you."

As prostitution became a regular feature and a public nuisance in religious places, the British barred the visit of courtesans to such places.

Says Jan Sahib :

"No courtesan can visit Karbala now O'sister
Such are orders of the ruler of Lucknow."

The maid servants who had their own affairs to mind and flirtations to enjoy as well as the palanquin bearers not only helped their begums in their love affairs as go-betweens but were at times won over by the admirers and conspired with them in their efforts to woo or even to possess them by hook or crook. Shauq describes how he birbed the palanquin bearers and the maid servants to have his lady-love in his house without her knowledge or consent.[99]

Then I happen to see
The Kahars bringing a finas
Fallowing it, comes a kaharin
She conveys something by signs
She showed her face, then hid it
She removed herself, having done her job
As there was a promise of generous reward
The kahars too disappeared in the grove.

Rangin, confirms this role of maid-servants in one of his rekhtis. A lady exclaims :

"Unfairly she led me to the net of Rangin,
O' God, let the neck of my maid be slashed."

Again :

"Maid, it's pity you spent the night here in gossips
Pray, being him here on one pretext or another.
If I get him this time, I swear by Ali,
Maid, I'll give you a heavy necklace."

A study of the rekhti written during the Newabi period shows that many women became sex perverts. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the harems of nawabs and nobles had a large number of women and their sexual desires remained mostly unsatisfied. Similarly even men from the gentry neglected their wives and preferred to spend their time with courtesans and mistresses. The following lines from rekhti composed by Rangin who flourished during the rule of Saadat Ali Khan, would show that a few women even used a artificial male organ for satisfaction of their sexual appetite.

> "*My partner, why did you insert a sabura today* ?
> *Your womb is bound to be hurt*."

For the reasons stated above, several women also indulged in **homosexuality.** Sample the following from the lips of ladies in rekhti.

> "*Last night I found you thieving on the roof O' maid*
> *On the top was the dark maid and below her was fair one*."
>
> (*Qais*)
>
> "*Lesbianism is irksome to me but for you*
> *I have developed a liking, nevertheless*."
>
> (*Rangin*)
>
> "*My abdomen has a shooting pain. I'm half dead*
> *Partner, do not tease me, I pray*."
>
> (*Rangin*)
>
> "*Your pigtail is like a moving serpent, partner*
> *I'll take poison for your sake, my partner*,"
>
> (*Insha*)
>
> "*I love you, my partner, but you don't O' Rangin*
> *My way of loving is somewhat different*."
>
> (*Rangin*)

In the above verse, the word 'partner' is a translation of the Urdu term 'dogana' (twins) or zanakhi (from 'zanakh' a two pronged bone of chest of a hen or pigeon). To become dogana the two intending ladies ate together one piece each of a twin kernel of an almond, walnut or any other fruit. One become a female dogana and the other a male one.[100] To become zanakhi the two friends would eat a plate of chicken together. They would pick up a zanakh and each would catch one branch and pull towards herself. Ultimately one of the two branches was broken. The lady having the broken piece in her hand, accepted the role of the female and other became her male partner.[101] This shows that homosexuality among the ladies of certain categories was not exactly a taboo but was more or less institutionalized, may be on a very limited scale.

In short, the women of Lucknow did not enjoy many rights in the society. They were, more or less, sex ojbects. Taht is why many begums rose high and exercised considerable influence over the king and the darbar, because of their feminine charm and capacity to keep the king under their spell. As soon as the king lost his interest in them, their influence too was over. However, many of them were able to get jagirs and amass huge wealth in their hey days. Such women and their descendants lived affluently and made their presence felt in the society. They took part in socio-religious and literary activities. The nobility to a large extent and the gentry to a small extent, emulated the king in having many wives and concubines. Many poor families sold their daughters to procurers or to nobility to serve as slave girls who were also used for pleasure. In Lucknow's society, love was not a serious thing but a sport and the term 'ishqbazi' used for affairs of love simply means game of love. No wonder, a woman had no status in her own capacity and had no claim on her husband who was free to indulge in unbridled lincentiousness in utter disregard of her feelings. Men's attitude towards sex, had its repercussions on girls and young ladies also and some of the girls and young married women could not completely cut themselves off from the prevailing bawdy atmosphere and indulged in premarital or extramarital sex. In large zenanas and haramseras especially where women starved for male company, many were lesbians. The society as a whole and men especially, seems to have developed an attitude of tolerance and understanding which helped them to ignore affairs of heart as far as possible and to resolve sex scandals and disputes amicably and without furore. The attitude of people of Lucknow towards sex was much more liberal and unorthodox than those of the English and other white people who were then upholders of Victorian values and were therefore critical of shape of things in Lucknow.

Lucknow, in those days, was a men's world in which the woman constituted the main attraction and was treated as the most favoured, expensive and valued commodity.

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8

THE RULE OF WOMEN

Whate'er happens to us to-day
It will form stories of 'morrow'
—*Amir Minai*

We have pointed out in the preceding chapter that women had no status of their own in the social order of Nawabi period. It may, therefore, seem anachronistic that many of the begums of Avadh played significant and sometimes decisive roles in the political affairs of their times and that their contribution to socio-religious and literary activities was considerable. However, if we analyse the situation, the reasons are not far to find. In keeping with the prevalent practice, almost all the ladies in the haramsera of the rulers and nobles, were able to amass wealth and secure jagirs in their own names during their hey-day, and were enabled to maintain an establishment of their own and a high standard of living even when their husbands were long dead or had lost interest in them. They took interest in and patronized socio-religious activities which helped in keeping them in lime-light and making them a living organ of the society. As long as they were able to keep their men under the spell of their charms and beauty, they were in a position to influence the political decisions of their espouses in smaller or greater measure, depending upon their own interest or their influencing capacity. But most of them completely lost their political influence and power as soon as their men lost interest in them. Nevertheless, on the strength of their wealth, they continued to make their presence felt in the cultural sphere. There were however, a few begums specially those having royal or noble antecedents whose political power not only outlived their espouses but increased in course of time. But, the number of such ladies was small and constituted a very small percentage of the strength of the heramsera of the king or nobles. Therefore, while it will be erroneous to determine the role and position of women in Avadh society on the basis of our knowledge about these chosen ladies they, nevertheless, made a profound impact on the socio-cultural and political life of their period and as such, it would be worthwhile to examine their role and contribution in some detail.

Before we examine the role of begums, it is necessary to have an idea of the backgrounds of the begums of rulers of Avadh. The Chief consort or the main begum of a ruler almost invariably belonged to a royal or noble family. According to custom, she was treated superior to secondary wives of her husband, who were expected to pay respects to her.[1] The women who did not belong to royal or noble families but caught fancy of the ruler and because begums were called Sahebat-e-Mahal.[2] These ladies belonged to all sorts of classes—courtesans, dominis, slave girls, female servants of haramsera or any other woman in or outside the palace, who was able to attract the attention of the ruler. The birth of a child or even pregnancy entitled a mistress, mamtua or inmate of the harem to be upgraded to the status of a begum. There were also some young women who hailed from good but poor families who were married to the ruler (or a noble) in an informal manner without a regular marriage procession. This was known as dola form of marriage.[3] However, the bed of a begum was not always considered a bed of roses because of restrictions imposed on her and her virtual confinement in her apartment. When Wajid Ali Shah offered to upgrade his fairies to the status of begums immediately after his coronation, they refused this honour to maintain their liberty.[4] When Nasiruddin Haider died, many of the courtesans who had become his secondary wives, preferred to go back to their houses rather than spend the rest of their lives in seclusion as King's widows, despite a promise of comfortable life by his successor.[5]

Let us now try to evaluate the role of some of the prominent Begums in the political and socio-cultural affairs of their times.

Nawab Sadr-i-Jahan Begum

It was because of his marriage with Sadr-i-Jahan Begum, daughter of Saadat Khan, that Safder Jung became the second nawab-vizier of Avadh. Naturally, she was held in great esteem by him and her advice was sought in political matters. When Safder Jung was defeated by the Pathans in the Battle of Ram Chatauni in 1750, Javed Khan and other Turk nobles of the Mughal Emperor plotted to confiscate his estate and divest him of his Vizarat. It was Sader-i-Jahan who then raised a force of ten thousand troops and prevailed upon her son. Shujauddaulah and others to fight for her husband's cause. It was on account of her bold action, firmness and tact that Safdar Jung was able to save his Vizarat. She helped him with large funds to strengthen his position with the help of the Jats and Marathas.[6]

When Shujauddaulah ascended the masnad of Avadh, Sadr-i-Jahan Begum assisted him in managing the state with her wise counsels. When Shujauddaulah caused widespread resentment among the Khatries by abducting an eighteen year old Khatri damsel, for a night of love, and some Mughal nobles plotted to replace him, it was her tactful and sagacious handling of the matter, which saved his neck. She called the nobles and admonished and pacified them simultaneously. Her orations had the desired effect.[7] It was, to a great measure, due to advice of the Begum that Shujauddaulah decided to support Mir Kasim against the British. When the former was going to fight the battle of Buxar in 1764, the begum asked him to bring twelve British prisoners to carry her palkee.[8]

Her political power, however, began to decline with the death of Shujauddaulah and ascension of Asafuddaulah on the masnad of Avadh. Ignoring her advice, he appointed Syed Murtza Khan Mukhatuddaulah who was never friendly to the dynasty of Saadat Khan, as his deputy. This man later did his best to harass her and Bahu Begum, the widow of Shujauddaulah. Initially the British supported her against the Nawab and discouraged her to go to Karbala where she intended to go, disgusted with the conduct of Asafuddaulah. But later Warren Hastings suspected her and Bahu Begum of having assisted Chet Singh, Raja of Banaras. This seems to have provided a justification decision for English decision to help Asafuddaulah in robbing her and Bahu Begum.[9]

She died broken hearted in 1796 when Asafuddaulah was still alive.

Sadr-i-Jahan was a devoted Shia and observed Muharram with fervour and fanfare. She constructed a mosque and an Imambara behind Moti Bagh at Faizabad.[10]

Bahu Begum

While Sadr-i-Jahan Begum was fortunate enough to be loved by her husband who knew no other woman and respected and listened to by her son, Shujauddaulah, Bahu Begum the next lady on our list, had to function under very difficult circumstances as her husband was totally indifferent towards her, being interested in innumerable women in and outside in his haramseras, her son Asafuddaulah was openly hostile to her and her step son Saadat Ali Khan who succeeded Asafuddaulah, had no love for her. Nevertheless, she lived like a reigning queen and was de facto ruler of Faizabad after Asafuddaulah had left it.

Popularly known as Bahu Begum, her real name was Ummatul Zohra. She was daughter of Mohammad Ishaq Khan Motmuddaulah, an Iranian noble of Mughal court and sister of Mohammed Ishaq Khan Najmuddaulah who too was one of the most important nobles of Emperor Mohammad Shah who was said to have been instrumental in arranging Ummatul Zohras's marriage to Shujauddaulah in 1745 A.D. It was a grand gala marriage indeed performed by spending forty-six lakhs of rupees.[11] But the marriage itself was not much of a success because the pleasure seeking habits of her young husband Shujauddaulah, however, held her in great esteem because of her selfless devotion to him and to the domain of Avadh. When her husband was in dire need of funds after his defeat at Buxar by the Englishmen, Bahu Begum gave him everything including her nose ring.[12]

In order to appreciate her role in the politics of her times fully, it may be mentioned that Bahu Begum presided over a large jagir consisting of mahals like Salon, Simrauta, Mohanganj, Jais, Khara, Parsiddipur, Rukka, Allta and Gonda and zilas such as Mirganj, Sindh, Ghoriabad, Nawab Ganj, Garahiya Khas, Begum Bari etc. She had also right to collect taxes for cattle branding and on meat markets in the entire territory. She was also owner of a large number of horses, houses and gardens besides a treasure of rich [13] jewellery. Thus she was not only a fabulously rich lady but a virtual ruler over a large territory which she held. She administered them with the help of a large number of officials, such as collectors, sub-collectors, tahsildars, police officers, zamindars, attendants, letter writers, etc., under the charge of her loyal eunuchs as already mentioned. She had 2,000 horsemen commanded by Ahmad Ali. For Salone alone there were 25 horsemen and 700 footmen. The total number of regular and irregular soldiers employed by her was estimated to be 10,000. She had a fleet of about 25 boats for river communication. She had a physician and an astrologer attached to her court.[14]

Shujauddaulah valued the advice of Bahu Begum in matters of states. Many nobles looked towards her for support. It was on her intervention that Haider Beg Khan an official of Shujauddaulah who had embezzled state funds, could save his neck.[15] When Asaffuddaulah took over as Nawab of Avadh, it was only to escape from her all pervading influence that he shifted his capital to Lucknow. However, her powers and authority were seriously challenged when Asafuddaulah appointed, Murtaza Khan who along with his brother had been earlier banished from Avadh by Shujauddaulah for gross misconduct, as naib. She was humiliated and tortured to surrender huge funds to Asafuddaulah who was encouraged and assisted by the English in this nefarious act. Ultimately, he paid Asafuddaulah 31 lakhs of rupees in cash, 70 elephants, 860 bullock carts and many precious articles and stones[16] which were however, underestimated by Murtaza Khan and she was asked to pay eleven lacs of rupees more.[17] The Begum sought English interference and support against the minister and her son, the Nawab but the Governor General declined to interfere on the ground that the Nawab was master in his own government.[18]

She also came in clash with another minister Haider Beg Khan who was earlier her own protege, she approached the Governor General again to replace him but Haider Beg got wise and foiled her attempts by promising to pay a crore of rupees to the Governor General i.e. Warren Hastings.[19] No wonder, Haider Khan only waited for an opportunity to have his vengeance. The chance soon presented itself. The Nawab had to pay huge arrears to the company. Haider Khan manoeuvred both the Nawab and Warren Hastings into agreeing confiscation of all jagirs in the dominion which included those of Sadr-i-Jahan Begum and Bahu Begum on the supposed involvement of the Begum in the rebellion of Chet Singh and alleged ill treatment of Col. Hanny's men by the eunuchs of Bahu Begum. The Jagirs were then resumed by the Nawab with British assistance although the Begum's men and Khwaja seras put up a stiff resistance. The Nawab also took away with him 50 lacs of rupees in cash and 50 lacs of property.[20] Thus she was cheated both by the Nawab who was her own son and the English in whose justice she seemed to have great confidence.

After Asafuddaulah, Bahu Begum played an important role both in making and marring the career of Wazir Ali as Nawab of Avadh. He ascended the masnad with her approval but soon she fell out with him and conspired with the English to replace him with Saadat Ali Khan. Unfortunately, her relations with Saadat Ali Khan too became strained. As he had an eye on her property, she placed it in the care of the Company. Her relations with Ghaziuddin Haider, successor of Saadat Ali Khan also were, however, cordial but the English saw to it that they did not meet each other fearing that she might revise her decision regarding her property in favour of the King.[21]

Bahu Begum was a good administrator. She was able to realise the strength of the English but failed to win their confidence despite her efforts. She did not pull on well with Asafuddaulah and his ministers who did their best to humiliate and torture her with English help and encouragement. She staged a comeback when Wazir Ali came to power. But her glory was shortlived. Her role in his removal as ruler of Avadh cannot be morally defended. She however, remained an important force and a domineering personality throughout her life. The rulers of Avadh and the English both feared her. She loomed large over Hastings in his impeachment. According to Faiz Bux,[22] 'no woman in all thirty-two subahs of India, can be held up as her rival in either the grandeur of her surroundings or the respect, she could command.'

Bahu Begum constructed an Imambara where majlises were held. She spent huge sums of money on Muharram celebrations, and observances. In fact, the pattern of religious activities adopted by her and her mother-in-law, Sadr-i-Jahan Begum, continued to be followed by their successors in Lucknow.

She died in 1815 when Chaziuddin Haider was ruling Avadh.

Nawab Shamshunnisa Begum

She was the Chief Begum of Asafuddaulah and was a grand daughter of Nawab Gamruddin, a vizier of the Mughal Emperor, whose family enjoyed a high social position. The family was Turani Mughal and was Sunni. But on marriage, the Begum and her brother, Imamuddin Khan who chose to settle at Lucknow, became Shias.[23] Shamshunnisa Begum was the first begum of a ruler who lived at Lucknow. She resided at Machhi Bhawan. She held the jagir of Pratapganj yielding an annual income of 60,000 rupees per yea.[24] She did not occupy any important position in the life of Asafuddaulah with whom she had no conjugal relationship. Her relations with Saadat Ali Khan were, strained and she sought Governor General's and Resident's interference and offered to quit Lucknow after handing over her jagir to their care. This provided an opportunity to the Resident to intervene in a purely domestic matter. She ultimately settled at Allahabad and Saadat Ali Khan provided her a pension equivalent to net revenues from her jagir which the British allowed the Nawab to manage.[25] She died at Allahabad but was later interned by the side of her husband in the Imambara-e-Asafi at Lucknow.[26] The Begum was a poetess in her own right. Here are four lines from one of her ghazals.[27]

Little pleasure in my heart, I find
If anything at all, it is sorrow, I find
Whether you come or not, every night,
I wait for you till morn.

Badshah Begum

The next important begum whose political role we propose to examine is Badshah Begum. She was greatly inspired by Sadr-i-Jahan and Bahu Begum, followed their life style and interest in political matters although, it must be stressed that she was much more ambitious and headstrong than any of the two.

Badshah Begum who was born in 1777 A.D., was daughter of Mubbashir Khan Munajjam-u-Mulk, an astronomer belonging to a respectable Rizvi syed family. She was married to Ghaziuddin Haider in 1974 at Benaras.[28] When Ghaziuddin Haider declared himself King of Avadh, she became the first queen of Avadh. She got the jagir of Salone once held by Bahu Begum. Her married life was not happy because Ghaziuddin Haider was a man of many women and she had no male issue to succeed him. She later adopted Sulaiman Jah Nasiruddin Haider born by a maid servant named Subh Danlat and brought him up as her own son.[29]

Like Bahu Begum, she too had problems with the King's ministers. But she successfully got rid of minister Agha-mir who incurred her displeasure when he relegated the heir apparent, Nasiruddin to the background on the occasion of the visit of the Governor General, Lord Moira.[30] The next minister Mirza Haji became instrumental in the marriage of Mubarak Mahal with the King. Badshah Begum could not tolerate such a man. So she helped Aghamir to return to power.[31] Later Agha mir became a source of trouble for her again. He created misunderstanding between her, the King and the English and was mainly responsible for banishment of Mir Fazl Ali, one of her trusted servants. He even managed to persuade Nasiruddin Haider to leave her mansion but she weaned him back after 26 days. The most hurting act of the minister was to impress upon the Resident that Munajan was not a son of Nassiruddin Haider in order to disinherit him and weaken the position of the Begum.[32]

When Nasiruddin Haider ascended the throne in 1827, Badshah Begum reigned supreme for sometime. Aghamir was removed and Mir Fazl Ali was recalled and appointed as minister to the new king in 1828. Hewever, his tenure was short and he was succeeded by Hakim Mahdi who was not at all friendly to the Begum. He tried to curtail her expenses. He successfully poisoned the King's ears with the result that he disowned Munajan as his son and informed the Resident accordingly. On her part, the Begum repudiated legitimacy of the king himself. In this way the Begum and King openly fell out to the satisfaction of the Hakim. The Hakim was, however, paid in his own coin when Nasiruddin who had become displeased with him for certain reasons, dismissed him on the ground that the minister had insulted and slighted his mother although his relations with her were becoming worse and worse. After the death of Qudsia Begum, a favourite wife of Nasiruddin Haider, whose death Badshah Begum did not mourn in the manner the King wanted her to mourn, he asked her to vacate the royal palace but she refused. The King and the Begum both, approached the Resident who initially refused to interfere in a purely domestic matter. The king then took a number of harassing measures against her and her armed men and she ultimately left the palace in 1835 but not without bloodshed resulting in killing of four of her slave girls. The Begum settled at Almas Bagh and took steps to recruit a large contingent of armed men to defend her and her premises. She grew so powerful that soon there was a confrontation between her troops and the King who had to seek English assistance again in order to contain her. This time, the Resident intervened effectively and prevailed upon the Begum to end confrontation and disband her troops. Soon after Nasiruddin Haider died in 1837. She attempted to place Munajan on the throne but the British foiled her scheme. They arrested her and Munajan and ultimately confined them within the fort of Chinar in Mirzapur district. This was however, not the end of Badshah Begum. She made a last attempt to approach the Board of Directors of the East India Company to press her claim for Munajan through her mediators and a white solicitor. Nothing came out of it. But the English grew apprehensive of her and ultimately forced her to disclaim the claim of Munajan in writing.[33]

She breathed her last when confined at Chunar in 1846.

It is thus clear that she plunged headlong in the politics of her period. Both the British and the King Nasriuddin were afraid of her strong personality and her influence. She was called 'Naibgar' (minister maker) and has certainly left a stronger imprint on the pages of history than the ruler of the period, Nasiruddin Haider.

Badshah Begum spent considerable time and money on religious celebrations. She introduced many practices and observances of Shia faith already described. Her religious activities were accompanied by grandeur, pomp and show. Although she was a bigoted Shia, she had considerations for Sunnis also. During a Muharram feud, she saved one Hasan Buksh who was a staunch Sunni.[34]

Some Secondry Wives

Mubarak Mahal, originally Mariam, who was a daughter of Col. Aish of Kanpur was married to Ghaziuddin Haider after she had embraced Islam. Mirza Haji and Aghami built her up as a rival to Badshah Begum.[35]

Malka Zamani was one of the most favourite wives of Nasiruddin Haider. He married her in 1826 when she was employed as 'anna' for his son, Munajan. She was originally a daughter of a Kori of Varanasi. She was purchased and brought up by a Muslim. Before she joined the palace, she lived a wayward life, having affairs with several men.[36] With ascension of Nasiruddin Haider on the throne of Avadh in 1827. Malka Zamani rose high and held a jagir yielding six lacs of rupees per annum. She exercised considerable political power during her peak period. Her son Qaiwan Jah from her previous husband, was declared as heir apparent by Nasiruddin Haider. Acoording to Fanny Parkes "She is after all, the person of the most political consequence, and she has great power over her royal husband whose ears she boxes occasionally."[37] The Malka was very devoted to Shia religion. On every nauchandi Thursday, she used to visit the Dargah of Hazarat Abbas with great pomp and show to pray for a child as she has no issue from the king.[38] In 1837, she constructed, a grand Imambara and a mosque in Golaganj On her death, in 1843, she was buried in the Imambara.[39]

Her daughter, Sultan Alia, from a previous husband, was married to a grandson of Mohammad Ali Shah. Sultan Alia's son Nawab Saeeduddulah, built a grand Karbala and her grand daughter, Ismat Ara Begum alias Puttan Saheb used to take out a magnificent tazia on the Chehlum day.[40] In the tazia procession which was joined by the elite as well as the common people, everyone had to be bareheaded and barefooted.[41]

Qudsia Begum, another begum of Nasiruddin Haider was responsible for the eclipse of Malka Zamani. She exercised a great influence over the king who listened to her advice in political matters. The minister Hakim Mahdi tried to be in her good books but his economic measures alienated the Begum, who was partly responsible for his ouster and appointment of his successor, Roshan Uddaulah. She directly addressed letters to the Resident. She was in charge of the collection of customs dues.[42] But for her untimely death in 1834, she would have played a much more important role in the affairs of Avadh during the reign of Nasiruddin Haider. Qudsia Begum was a generous lady and distributed charity bountifully. She constructed a Karbala near Chhattar Manzil which was, however, destroyed during the upheaval of 1857.[43]

Nasiruddin Haider married a famed dancer, Bhajju Tawaif, who was later titled Taj Mahal. After Nasiruddin Haider's death, she developed intimacy with Meer Kalbe Husain and migrated to Iraq. She constructed a mosque and a rest house for pilgrims at Karbala in Iraq. She also created a Trust in Iran with an arrangement to hold majlises after every eight days and to disburse scholarships to Shia students.[44] Taj Mahal had two daughters from Meer Kalbe Hussain. The younger one had a daughter Kulsum Begum. She was married to Maulvi Asghar Hussain who got a large property as a result of this marriage. He constructed a stately building at Patanala where the couple used to hold majlises which were known for their large gatherings. On 5th of Mouharram they used to take out an alam procession to the Dargah of Hazarat Abbas with great fanfare.[45]

Malka Afaq

Nawab Malka Afaq alias Khetu Begum was the chief consort of Mohammad Ali Shah, who came from the family of Qamruddin Khan, a vizier of Mughal Emperor. She did not take active part in political affairs in the life-time of her husband. Her son and next ruler Amjad Ali Shah, however, consulted her in making important appointments.[46] Amjad Ali Shah's religious zeal to run the government according to Shia Shariat can at least partly be traced to the religiousness of Malka Afaq.[47] It was on her advice that Roshanuddulah did not quit his post when Wajid Ali Shah ascended the throne. Wajid Ali Shah appointed her brother Mir Enayat Ali, her old servant, Abdul Latif and many others to important posts on her advice. She built the famous Karbala, now known after her name near Shia College on Sitapur Road. The Karbala is also called 'Askarain' because it contains the copies of the tombs of Hazarat Imam Hasan Askari and Hazarat Imam Taqui.[48] The main attraction of the Karbala was its floor which was made of yellow, red and green chaukas which looked like a chess board. Making of such chaukas was a special craft of Lucknow which alas, died along with its last artisan, Gulab Kahar, in 1885.[49]

Malka-i-Jahan

Among Mohammad Ali Shah's secondary wives, Malika-i-Jahan occupied an important position. She was very well provided for by the king. It was she who completed the construction of the Jama Masjid left incomplete by her husband. She had trouble from her step son, Amjad Ali Shah who had succeeded Mohammad Ali Shah and also Wajid Ali Shah, successor of Amjad Ali Shah, over financial matters and division of property. After 1837, some of her buildings at Lucknow were occupied by the English while she was away on pilgrimage which she could not retrieve. She died in Bombay on her way to Mecca.[50]

Malka Kishwar

Malka Kishwar Taj Ara Begum was chief consort of Amjad Ali Shah. She came from the family of Khan-i-Khana of Delhi. She was not politically active in the life time of her husband. During the reign of Wajid Ali Shah, however, her importance increased. According to Sleeman, she arrogantly interfered in the affairs of the State. When Munnavar Ali Khan, the taluqdar of Nanpara died, the Begum interceded, on behalf of the younger rani although the elder rani and her son had already taken control and had decidedly a better claim to the estate. The matter went up to the Resident who asked the king to stop the Begum from interfering in administrative matter.[51] She also advised Wajid Ali Shah in appointment of high officials.[52] She used to hold a darbar to hear grievances of women from all over the kingdom but her servants allowed them to have audience with her only when their palms had been greased.[53]

Although Sleeman had opposed the queen's interference in political matters, he was nevertheless impressed by her foresight, ability and statesmanship. When he suggested Regency Council for Avadh, her name was first among the proposed members.[54] She was perhaps the saddest person when the kingdom of Avadh was annexed in 1856. When the news reached her, she was dressing after a bath. Bareheaded and barefooted, she stepped out, exclaiming 'The kingdom is destroyed'. Then she entered her son's parlour and asked 'Are you now satisfied? Have you got at last the wages of your dancing, your singing and your fiddling ? Have I not often told you that it would come to this'.[55]

She had courage, will and boldness enough to travel to England in 1856 to plead for her son before Queen Victoria. She was accompanied by her younger son, Prince Sikander Hashmat, Masihuddin Khan, Crown Prince Mirza Hamid Ali and many others. She was able to see Queen Victoria on 4th July, 1857 at Buckingham Palace. Soon after, the upheaval of 1857 started and the mission came to a naught. She applied for an independent pension from the Court of Directors and an advance of rupees three lacs to proceed to Kaaba for pilgrimage. Her request was however, not granted but never the less she left England for Arabia and died shortly afterwards in Paris in 1858, where she had reached on her way.[56] She had a good knowledge of both Urdu and Persian language and had studied religious books on Shia religion. In the morning, a maulvi who sat on the other side of the curtain, recited the Holy Quran in her presence.[57] She did not change her clothes, did not wear ornaments and did not use mehndi on her hands and feet from first of Muharram till the Chehlum. One 9th Muharram she used to hold a majlis at her residence which lasted the whole night. On the tenth of Muharram, she and members of her household fasted. Even small babies were not given milk till the tazias were buried.[58]

Secondary Wives of Amjad Ali Shah

Several other wives of Amjad Ali Shah too had considerable hold on him and interfered in political matters. According to Sleeman, three of King's begums namely, Husaini Khanam, Mosahib Khanum and Sakina Khanum had great influence over him.[59] The begums managed to get their close relations appointed as amils. In several cases, they persuaded the king to appoint such persons as amils who had bribed them.[60] They tried to extract money from Darshan Singh, a noble wanted by Nepal Government, who had taken refuge with the king. To quote Sleeman, 'the wives wished not only to screw out of the (Darshan Singh's) family a large sum for the king and themselves but to confiscate the estates and distribute them among their male relations.[61] The king finally confiscated the estates of Birsan Singh, brother of Darshan Singh and Husaini Khanam got her father, Husain Ali, appointed as manager.[62]

Suroor sums up the situation in his flowery and hyperbolic language thus 'in his period the courtesans had their hey-day. He who has his youthful daughter inside (the haramsera), rides his horse in a grandiose manner outside . . . and he whose (female) relation is the ustani (teacher), has superseded every one else, has joined the company of the five horsemen and became governor of Salone . . . .Because of their mothers and sisters, the mean are enjoying life of the nobles. In short he who has a link in the palace, has his moustaches up. Woe to the persons who have no sisters, no mothers and no aunts.'[63]

It is worthwhile to refer to yet another secondary wife of Amjad Ali Shah, Malika Ahad, originally a slave girl, who took an active part in the Freedom Struggle of 1857. The sepoys offered the Crown of Avadh to her son if she gave them 3 lacs of rupees but the begum declined to make the payment[64] although she had promised to pay the soldiers in advance if her son was crowned.[65] As a punishment for her part in the rebellion, the English reduced her pension to half and confiscated Mohammad Bagh and other properties belonging to her.[66]

Nawab Khas Mahal

Foremost among the wives of Wajid Ali Shah, was his chief consort, Nawab Alam Ara Begum, commonly known as Nawab Khas Mahal married to him in 1838. She was the daughter of Nawab Ali Khan who hailed from one of the important and noble families of Delhi. However, he soon fell out with her because of his intrigues with female employees of the Palace.[67] But she remained on his side in his difficult days and accompanied him to Calcutta on his deposition.

Nawab Khas Mahal was not sure of the success of the plan of Malika Kishwar and others for restoration of the kingdom by petitioning Queen Victoria and tried to dissuade the Crown Prince from joining them in their mission to London. When Wajid Ali Shah was imprisoned in Fort William during 1857 struggle, Nawab Khas Mahal remained at Matiaburj and directly corresponded with the British. In her letters, she emphatically denied Wajid Ali Shah's complicity in the Mutiny and pleaded for his early release. After release of Wajid Ali Shah, however, the relations between him and the Begum became strained as a result of misunderstanding created by interested parties and the Begum faced considerable financial difficulties. Her attempts to secure a separate pension from the British failed. She felt all the more bitter when she learned that the British had decided to make financial provision for Hazrat Mahal and Birjis Qadar.[68] In his relation with the British, the Begum appears to have advised the King to adopt a dignified approach. When the King wrote a qasida highly flattering to Lord Canning, the Governor General, she initially refused to hand over the royal seal for affixing it to the poem on the ground that it was nothing sort of disguised begging but the King paid no heed to her.[69] She lived for seven years more after Wajid Ali Shah's death, breathing her last on 13th March, 1897 at Matiaburj.

She was a poetess too with 'Alam' as her takhallus. She composed a collection of ghazals titled 'Beyaz e-Ushshaq' (Lover's Diary) and a masnavi titled 'Masnavi-e-Alam'. Here, are a few samples of her poetry.[70]

(1)

You abased yourself, You abased me
Wherever you sat, you talked of me
Destined if I were to bear these sorrows,
O'God, why did you create me?

(2)

At me you laugh, what a pity
O' God let no one's heart be trapped thus,
Entitled you are to commit atrocities
I deserve them and so deserves my heart.

(3)

O' God gone from the world is tradition of love.
Now we are ashamed of the name of Love.
If he commits atrocities, it becomes him
We are being punished for our Love.

(4)

Teacher, why do you frighten me with death ?
A lover is ne'er afraid to lose his life
Without hope we live in the Garden of World like cypress.
Richly green to see but no fruit to bear.

Secondary Wives of Wajid Ali Shah

The marriage of Wajid Ali Shah with Nawab Akhtar Mahal had political implications because she was daughter of his minister, Ali Naqui Khan who wanted to buttress his position through this marriage, Malika Kishwar who was not pulling on well with Nawab Khas Mahal, supported this marriage to reduce the influence of the first lady.[71] When Wajid Ali Shah left for Matiaburj after annexation, Nawab Akhtar Mahal stayed back at Lucknow with her father but both father and daughter joined the King a few months after. The King was extremely fond of her and appointed her son, Mirza Khushbakht Bahadur as his heir apparent on the death of Qaiwan Qader Mirza Hamid Ali.[72]

Some of the wives of Wajid Ali Shah who were residing at Lucknow during the Freedom Struggle, gave shelter and saved lives of four English ladies and girls with the active help of Darogha Meer Wajid Ali. Among them was Nawab Akhter Mahal also. Other begums were Amir Mahal, Sultan Jahan Begum, Shahenshah Mahal, Fakhr Mahal, Umrao Mahal, Saiyada Mahal and Khurd Mahal.[73]

Amir Mahal was one of the six wives of Wajid Ali Shah whom he divorced with their consent on the eve of his departure to Matiaburj. She later married Qazi of Barabanki. She built an imambara at Lucknow and also a grand mosque, at Barabanki. She used to hold large majlises in her lifetime. Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum who entered the harem of Wajid Ali Shah through the Parikhana, is said to have started a Menhdi procession in Lucknow on seventh day of Muharram. She created a trust to meet expenses of the procession and other religious functions after her death with Meer Wajid Ali as trustee.[74]

Pari Mahal, yet another mamtua begum of the last king, used to hold zenana majlises daily and male majlises biweekly from first of Muharram to Chehlum.[75]

Mashooq Mahal, another favourite wife of Wajid Ali Shah, built an imambara and a grand mosque in Lucknow. The former is no longer in existence but the latter still exists in Mohani Ka Purwa, in a ruinous condition.[76]

Nawab Hazrat Mahal

Nawab Hazrat Mahal is decidedly the most well known begum of Wajid Ali Shah because of her heroic and courageous role in the Freedom Struggle of 1857 when her minor son, Birjis Qadar was crowned as King of Avadh by the sepoys. Interestingly, she was not a particularly favourite or important wife of Wajid Ali Shah and her role in the political affairs till the outrbeak of the Struggle was insignificant. Wajid Ali Shah did not care for her much during his exile and did not enter into a regular correspondence with her.

Originally Mahak Pari, she was employed in the Parikhana. When she became pregnant, she was made a begum and given title of Iftikharunnisa Begum. Wajid Ali Shah describes the event as follows :[77]

Strange enough, her stars ascended,
Pregnant became Mahak Pari
The Fairy's status improved
She was titled Pride of Women
In short, the pregnancy period was over
Happiness arrived w'en nine months were over
Then the lucky child was born
With whom Destiny itself was in Love.
His title shines like the Moon
He is Mirza Birjis Qadar Bahadur

On coronation, Wajid Ali Shah conferred on her the title of Nawab Hazrat Mahal. According to Elihu Jan[78] Hazrat Mahal was one of his eight begums who were divorced by him on detection of inauspicious marks of a snake on their backs. This fact is also corroborated by Sleeman.[79]

When the struggle broke at Lucknow, the rebels were on the look out for a ruler. According to Elihu Jan, they forcibly took away Birjis Qadar despite pleadings and protestation by Hazrat Mahal.[80] However, according to Kamaluddin Haider Birjis Qadar was selected by the rebels only after efforts by Mammu Khan, the steward of Hazrat Mahal who had to agree to a number of conditions before Birjis Qadar was made King.[81] The British questioned legitimacy of Birjis Qadar and spread the canard that he was son of Mammu Khan. In view of her role in the Freedom Struggle, the British were, obviously, prejudiced and did their best to discredit Hazrat Mahal and her son.

As Birjis Qadar was a minor, it was Nawab Hazrat Mahal who functioned as the dejure regent and de facto ruler and organizer of resistance against the British. It was she who tried to organise persons of conflicting interests and views on one, platfrom in order to defeat the British. From 7th July, 1857 when Birjis Qadar was crowned and till 16th July, 1858 when she and Birjis Qadar left Lucknow for Bundi and thence to Nepal, it was rule of Hazrat Mahal over Lucknow and adjoining areas. According to Russel, who was present in Lucknow in the crucial period, "This Begum exhibits great energy and ability. She had excited all Oude people to take up interest of her son, and the chiefs have sworn to be faithful to him.'[82] He further described her 'as ardent, intriguing, subtle, courageous and devoted to her son.'[83]

The British were ultimately able to recapture Lucknow. Her life in Nepal was beset with problems but she stoutly refused to renounce the claim of her son by accepting a British pension. Finally Nepali Prime Minister sanctioned a pension of five hundred rupees for her and her son and provided them a suitable accommodation at Kathmandu in 1860. She died in wilderness in April 1879. Thus ended the life and career of a woman who despite her humble birth, not only rose to be wife of a King but who, in an hour of crisis and emergency, exhibited great qualities of head and heart, courage, statesmanship, organizing capacity, poise, dignity and clear vision. Russel was perfectly right when he said, that she was a 'better man than her husband.'[84]

Begum's Correspondence

The letters exchanged between Wajid Ali Shah while he was residing at Matiaburj and his wives who were in Lucknow, are, in fact, pieces of literature which are reminiscent of the literary style of those days i.e. the style of Rajab Ali Beg Suroor as adopted in Fisanai Ajaib and Fisanai Ibrat. In this style, ideas were expressed in flowery language and poetic phrases. Although this style often hampered free expression of ideas, the literary content of such letters was highly appreciated in those days. Portions of some of the letters are in verse too. Prominent among the letter writing begums residing in Lucknow, were Shaida Begum, Hur Begum, Fatima Begum Dilpazir Begum, Mehndi Begum, Munnawar Begum, Farkhunda Mahal, Umrao Begum and Naurozi Begum. Of them Shaida Begum and Hur Begum were poetesses in their own right. The following are a few lines from a versified letter sent by Shaida Begum.[85]

"*Missi on lips, surma in eyes,*
Henna decorating hands and feet
Pink pyjamas and red shirt
Dupatta made of gauze and paddy coloured
This Sawan is passing unenjoyed
If you come now, it'd be fun."

Some of the letters refer to the political events of those days including the Freedom Struggle of 1857.

Farkhunda Begum, for instance, informed Wajid Ali Shah of the beginning of Sepoys' revolt in Lucknow although unlike Hazrat Mahal she was not sympathetic to their cause. She wrote:[86]

"On the eighth of this month, the British army revolted, the reason being distribution of (new) cartridges. They all collected in Musa Bagh to kill the Christians. Despite pleadings, none accepted the path of peace. . . . At the time of writing, there is still a large collection of sepoys . . . . "

When the struggle started, most of the begums left Lucknow. Hur Begum wrote to the imprisoned King.[87]

" . . . . In short, when all of your wives ran helter-skelter, I too left along with Shahzadee. I however, got separated from others. All my belongings and baggage were plundered . . . ."

Shaida Begum wrote in a similar strain.[88]

". . . . Whatever cash, ornaments and goods I possessed, had to be left behind in Hazrat Bagh . . . . Things have come to such a pass that when I fail to secure a loan, I have to starve. I do not know what is in store for me . . . . Please call me or I'll manage to come to you of my own accord . . . ."

Other matters dealt with in these letters pertain to requirement of money by Begums, description of weather, crops and fairs and pangs of separation. The contents also show that not only the King but also his wives were optimistic that Wajid Ali Shah would get back his kingdom and return to Lucknow. Shaida Begum ended one of her letters with the following couplet.[89]

God should always keep you healthy
And bestow on you your country.

Some of the King's letters show that sometimes news about illicit affairs and infidelity of his Lucknow based Begums reached him at Matiaburj. He expressed his anguish and agitation in his letters. In a letter addressed to Shaida Begum, he mentioned a complaint of this nature brought to his notice. In her reply, the begum repudiated the charge in an interesting manner, taking the whole thing lightly.[90]

As already stated, it was a common practice among the royalty and nobility in those days to have chitthinavis (letter writers) in their employment. As such, it is difficult to say which of the letters were written or dictated by the begums themselves and which were written for them by the chitthinavis. Whatever be the case, the letters constitute an important heritage of past Lucknow.

In the end, it may be summarized that the chief consorts of the Avadh rulers, most of whom came from or were closely related to, noble families of Delhi and connected with the Mughal darbar, brought prestige and power to their husbands. Although except for Sadri-i-Jahan, others could not win undivided love of their husbands who were fond of keeping large harems, nevertheless, they helped them in political and administrative matters. Begums like Bahu Begum, Badshah Begum and Malika Kishwar became politically active mainly after the death of their husbands. Many also tried to have direct relation with the East India Company and the Resident and sought their interference in domestic matters. But then the Nawabs, too, sometimes sought British help against the Begums. This created situations in which the Begums or the Nawabs or both of them were the losers. Undoubtedly, most of these Begums were more keenly and jealously interested in preserving the rule of the Nawabs themselves who were mostly weak men under the influence of unscrupulous nobles who had their own axe to grind and who played into British hands.

A large number of secondary begums and favourites of the rulers, not only tried to undermine the position of the chief consorts but also indulged in political intrigues to serve their own selfish interests or those of certain ministers whose proteges they were. Without exception, the chief consorts, however, tried to be on the right side of the British. It was left to a rather obscure and neglected begum, Hazrat Mahal, to play a significant and outstanding role in the Freedom Struggle of 1857. The power and influence of most of other secondary begums were shortlived because they were dependent on the pleasure of their masters who were in the habit of changing their women as often as they changed their dresses.

It was the usual practice of the rulers of Avadh to bestow jagirs on their favourite begums and to make a reasonably permanent financial provision for them. This enabled the begums to live an independent and carefree life and also to bestow favours on their relations, dependants and friends. Some of the Begums among whom Bahu Begum is most outstanding, managed their jagirs efficiently and showed a great executive acumen. Sadr-i-Jahan Begum and Bahu Begum were the trendsetters in as much as they began patronizing social, religious and literary activities. They spent large sums of money on Muharram celebrations including majlises and the tabarruk they distributed in these majlises. Muharram ceremonies and taziadari, it may be emphasized, had been almost secularized and were observed by all sections of the population. The result was that many of these begums were looked upon with love and respect being instrumental for providing charity to many and means of livelihood to others. The begums who outlived the events of 1857, will be especially remembered for their munificence and charity when a large number of people were rendered unemployed and were without means of livelihood after the end of Nawabi rule. Some of the begums were also patrons of poets especially marsiya writers, story tellers and theologians. A few of them were poetesses in their own right. Most of them also patronized astrologers, astronomers and maulvis.

The chief consorts, without exception, lived a pure, chaste and dignified life. They saw to it that no scandals were linked to their names. But this cannot be said about secondary wives, mamtuas and mistresses of the rulers. Many of them carried on clandestine affairs but it would be unfair to blame them in view of the bawdy atmosphere around them and open debauchery which their husbands indulged and forgot them after a few nights of love.

Strange as it may seem, in a society where women did not enjoy many rights and had almost no claim on their husbands, the Begums of Avadh, as a class, seem to have exercised considerable power in political matters. Their contribution in socio-religious and literary fields, has been of a lasting nature. Compared with their husbands and masters, the chief consorts have definitely given a much better account of themselves and did more to preserve the dynastic rule of Barhan-ul-Mulk than the rulers themselves. Despite their handicaps, the begums of Avadh have left a lasting imprint on the socio-cultural life of Avadh.

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9

BEYOND THE PALACE

Beyond the stars, there are other worlds too.
—*Iqbal*

The people of Lucknow had close links with the royal residence and mahalsera as well as the kothis of the nobility to which they largely owed their livelihood and status in society. Beyond the palace, however, there was another citadel of power or more correctly, super-power namely, the Residency from where the British ruled the King of Avadh.

British Impact

The effective role of the Residency in Avadh began with the rule of Asafuddaulah in 1774. Although the Nawab himself had sought British help to squeeze money from Bahu Begum and others, later he became so sick of British interference in the domestic affairs of Avadh that he had no desire left to live. The Subsidiary Treaty of 1801 forced by Lord Wellesely, the Governor General, further undermined the position of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan who was treated harshly by the Residents, Col. Scott and Col. Baillie. The latter had assumed the functions of a dictator and made an ostentatious exhibition of his authority.[1]

The next Governor-General, Lord Hastings, however, initiated a new policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Avadh in 1815. The rulers of Avadh, therefore, had comparatively much less interference in their affairs from the British Residents between 1815 and 1839. However Col. Caulfield who took over as Resident in 1839 planted his men in important positions and played a dominant and domineering role in the affairs of the kingdom between 1839-41. When Amjad Ali Shah developed serious differences with the Resident, Sir George Pollock, the latter was strongly defended by the Governor-General who warned the king that 'a systematic disregard of the Envoy's representations is an infraction of the Treaty.'[2] Davidson (1845-1847) continuously interfered in the affairs and put his men in high places. Col. Sleeman came to Lucknow as Resident in 1849. He threw all norms to winds, openly humiliated the King, Wajid Ali Shah and ordered him about. He even stopped the King from using his title Ghazi on the royal seal. He invited applications against the King from his own subjects during the extensive tour of the country despite King's objections.[3] Col. Outram who joined as Resident in December, 1854, came only to prepare a report to facilitate the take-over of Avadh by the British. No wonder, he behaved like a super-power and left no doubt in the minds of the people that the British were the real rulers of Avadh who not only made and unmade Kings, got appointed their stooges in key positions and forced the king to take action against officials who happened to incur their displeasure, but also directly dealt with many citizens of Avadh.[4]

As a result of loans, advanced by Nawabs and begums of Avadh to the British, the guaranteed persons came into existence as already described. These persons claimed British protection even against their ruler, resulting in administrative choas. For many years, the British Resident held a separate durbar of his own every Saturday where amidst the pomp and show of an Eastern State, the vakeels of the Avadh princesses, the guaranteed nobles and other individuals assembled[5] and the Resident received or heard their petitions like a ruler. The control of the Resident on the guaranteed persons, can be judged from the fact that on hearing about illicit affairs of certain begums i.e. widows of former rulers, the Resident appointed mahaldars whose expenses had to be borne by the begums themselves, to keep a watch on their morals and report regularly to the Resident.[6]

As a result, a large number of people came in contact with the Resident and other English people. They included serving classes, clerks, officers and other Indian employees, Indian soldiers serving British army and even the courtesans performing mujra at the Residency besides the guaranteed persons, their dependants and hangers on.

While the English were looked upon with respect and awe by royalty, nobility and commonality, there was no appreciable impact of British culture and way of life on the latter, although the rulers and the elite adopted some European ways.

George Viscount Valentia who visited Lucknow in 1803 in the period of Saadat Ali Khan, was invited for breakfast by the Nawab. He was led to a breakfast table in a room furnished with chairs and every other article was in the Eurapean style. The breakfast consisted of items like teas, ices, jellis, sweetmeats, French pies and other dishes, both hot and cold. The service was English.[7]

Here is a description of a dinner given by the Nawab in honour of Valentia. 'The dinner was French with plenty of wine although the Mohammedans drank none . . . and a band of music played English tunes during the whole time . . . English knives, forks, spoons, wine glass, decanters and cut glass vases—how could these convey any idea that we were seated in a court of an Asiatic Prince.'[8]

Bishop Heber who was invited by Ghaziuddin Haider for breakfast in 1824 or 1825, corroborates the account of Valentia. 'The furniture was altogether English, coffee, tea, butter, eggs and fish were carried round by the servants. Things proceeded much as at a public breakfast in England.'[9]

Nasiruddin Haider was very fond of European dress, food and furniture. He had a teacher to teach him English language and even an European barber. The latter became his close confidant. He had a French chef too. In his Darbar, he used a chair in place of the traditional masnad. No wonder, he had a white wife too.[10]

The nobility, too, seem to have been impressed by the British life and language. Nawab Hakim Mahdi was fond of writing in English to the Europeans. Fanny Parkes found his expressions curious. He wrote her a letter in which he implored her "not to bury his fellowship and affection in oblivion."[11]

Meer Hasan Ali, the husband of the authoress of 'Observations on the Mussulmauns of India' was well versed in English language. He remained in England from 1810 to 1816 an assistant to a well known oriental, scholar John Shakespear, Professor of Hindustani at the Military College Addiscombre.[12] Later during the reign of Amjad Ali Shah, he was appointed king's safeer (ambassador) to the Residency. According to Suroor, Meer Hasan Ali, did not enhance the prestige of his monarch because his only qualification was that whenever he opened his mouth, he spoke in English.[13]

We also have it from Mirza Qateel that on the occasion of Holi, the inmates of the royal haramsera organized functions in which they mimicked the British males and English language.[14]

We also find that English cloth and toys were available in the markets of Lucknow. Even glass tazias and other items of cut glass found their way from England to Lucknow.

The clerks and other Indians employed by the Resident, too, learnt a smattering of English language.

On the whole English culture and language did not have any appreciable impact on the common people of Lucknow but they certainly considered the British as super rulers of Avadh and treated them with awe and respect. On the other hand, we have enough evidence to conclude that the British and other Europeans followed many oriental customs and many liked or found it expedient to adopt an oriental life style.

Thus despite the enormous political power enjoyed by the Resident and his men, they were not able to make any dent in the cultural domain. On the contrary, despite the steady political loss of power of the Nawabs, which began with Shujauddaulah and ended with Wajid Ali Shah on annexation of Avadh, the rulers of Avadh dominated the cultural scene in Avadh throughout their rule of 130 years. The different facets of Lucknow's culture we have described in this book, have more or less, centred round the palaces of royalty, kothis of nobility and deorhis of begums. However, even in the highly feudal society of Avadh, culture could not be contained within four-walls of the feudal mansion. Even within these four-walls, people made their entry as serving classes and some of their daughters even exercised influence and power as begums, concubines or courtesans. Then the people played important roles in religious functions, majlises, processions and fairs where they rubbed shoulders with the gentry and even nobility. Therefore, although the higher classes maintained distance from the people and contemptuously dubbed everything emanating from them as 'aamiana', the contribution of people in shaping Lucknow's composite culture is both significant and distinct and to a certain extent, the credit for this should go to the rulers of Avadh themselves who, thanks to their catholicity and open mindedness in socio-religious matters as well as love for pleasures of life, willingly accepted and adopted local rituals, customs, practices and forms of dialect and music. It is therefore, necessary that we should study the people, their pursuits and role in socio-economic and cultural life of Avadh in some detail.

Rural Areas

We have described in some detail that revenues poured into Lucknow from the rural areas of Avadh. This was collected through state functionaries, contractors, taluqdars and zamindars. Although none of them were sympathetic towards the tillers of the soil, the ryot was better off under the taluqdars who owned the major portion of the land than under other land managers.[15] It may be mentioned that except in the last days of the Nawabi rule, the cultivators of Avadh enjoyed a happier destiny than their counterparts of western part of the provinces and the Ganga-Jamuna doab in the British territory.[16] Bishop Heber who visited Avadh towards the close of the reign of Ghaziuddin Haider found that Avadh was in a far better state of cultivation than he had expected to find it.[17] Even during the days of Wajid Ali Shah, a great part of Avadh was more rinhly cultivated than any part of the Company's territory. It was better manured and irrigated than the land in British India.[18]

However, the Nawabi Government did not formulate any systematic programme for development of agriculture and irrigation. Although land revenue formed the main source of state income, no funds were ploughed back to the villages for their development. The rural people lived a rather dull and monotonous life away from the hubbub of Lucknow Town. In fact, rural areas and Lucknow remained poles apart in many respects. Nevertheless the rural people maintained their links with the capital city and other towns of the kingdom.

Towns

Second only to Lucknow both in population and political power, was Faizabad. Although it was neglected after Asafuddaulah had shifted the capital to Lucknow and after Bahu Begum was no more, Faizabad continued to occupy an important place on the map of Avadh. It had a large Shia population and remained a centre of Shia learning. Faizabad much necessarily be treated as an appendage of Lucknow in the context of this study.

There were many more towns in the territory of Avadh in the midst of villages, which were, however, much smaller than Lucknow or Faizabad. Among them can be mentioned Bahraich, Balrampur, Biswan, Bilgram, Gonda, Gosaiganj, Gopamau, Kakori, Kursi, Miaganj, Mohan, Nasirabad, Rudauli, Safipur, Salone, Sandila, Sultanpur, Jais, Mallawan, Suhali etc. These were headquarters of the landlords who had built up their mansions or forts and settled there to manage their property in the villages around.[19]

There also lived many of the state functionaries like nazims and chakledars who governed the rural areas from their forts at these places.[20] Most of these places had in their population an ingredient of Sunni Muslims who had settled there much before the advent of Nawabi rule. Some of such towns had developed as centres of Islamic learning and jurisprudence based on Sunni tenets. Because of the influence of Sunni ulema who had acquired established reputation for their knowledge and learning and also because the Shias and their ulema preferred to be in Lucknow, a large majority of the towns could not be dominated by Shias and elements of Shia culture but they could not remain immune from their impact either. However, in towns where Shia taluqdars had established themselves, the impact of Lucknow and Shiism, was much more perceptible. Among such places can be mentioned Mahmudabad, Salempur, Jahangirabad, Pirpur, etc.

It should also be borne in mind that many people from villages and towns used to go to Lucknow and other towns to seek their fortune or employment as soldiers, artisans, domestic servants, courtesans etc. Thus links, connections and contacts were established between the rural and towns people on one hand and the Lucknowites on the other, which were much stronger than the links of the state officials or taluqdars who kept aloof from the people.

As a result of these intercommunications, we find that many socio-religious practices of Lucknow especially those connected with Muharram, were adopted by a large section of Sunni Muslims and many Hindus outside Lucknow. Muharram processions and their outfits and sacred objects assumed a popular and a secular character. Shia population itself was, however, not able to spread out much in the rural areas and towns except those places where Shia taluqdars ruled. Also despite absence of official patronage, Sunni Ulema maintained their tradition of scholarship and hold over Sunni masses.

People of Lucknow

Now let us examine the situation in Lucknow itself. We have dealt with royalty and nobility in some detail and have made passing references to the gentry. Let us now have a look at the occupational pattern of people residing in Lucknow other than the feudal classes.

An influential and important class of people who has not been mentioned so far and who played not only an important role during Nawabi days but also helped in speedy downfall of the Nawabi rule and economic ruination of the nobility in the post-Nawabi era, were the bankers of Lucknow. They transacted business through hundies (bills of exchange) and provided security for big zamindars and taluqdars when they defaulted in payment of land revenue.[21] According to F.J. Shore, the property of Lucknow's bankers and shopkeepers was far superior to that of any city with the probable exception of Calcutta in the British territory.[22]

Then there was another important class touching the upper fringe of the lower classes and lower fringe of lower middle classes. It consisted of the artisans who formed a class by themselves. These workmen prospered under the protection of the King and nobles who loved to have articles of luxury. They, however, suffered badly in the post-Nawabi period. According to Crooke, 'under our practical and from this point of view rather dreary and shabby rule, much of this (handicraft) has ceased.'[23]

Let us now take a hurried look at the crafts and craftsmen of Lucknow.

Cotton Fabrics

In Lucknow cotton fabrics of every description from the coarsest cloth (garha) to fine muslin were manufactured by Muslim Julahas and Behnas and Hindu Kories whose population in 1901 was 4059.[24] The varieties of muslins made in Lucknow were malmal, tarandan, adhi and sherbati (adhi dyed yellow with saffron).[25]

Cotton Printing

It was imported to Lucknow by the Nawabs from Farrukhabad.[26] The articles produced were quilts and chintz.[27]

Dyeing of cloth was yet another industry which flourished during the Nawabi rule.[28]

Chikan Works

It may appear rather bizarre but there is no gain saying the fact that it is the chikan work of Lucknow which will perpetuate the memory of past Lucknow. For while Lucknow has lost most of its old culture and etiquette, celebrations and processions, it is the chikan industry which has not only survived but is in flourishing state, to-day and is destined to last long and make its and Lucknow's presence felt all over the world.

According to a popular story, Lucknow's chikan embroidery took its birth in the harem of one of the early Nawabs. One of Nawab's wives or concubines was from Murshidabad, then famous for chikan work. She was a skilled seamstress. Fed up with the boredom of harem life, she embroidered a chikan cap and presented it to the Nawab. This was later taken up by other inmates of the harem who used their individual imagination and skill to make new stitches and patterns. In course of time, the art came out of the harem and developed into a flourishing craft. It is perhaps, because of this tradition that the status conscious and tradition bound ladies of Lucknow belonging to nobility and gentry in straitened circumstances, have taken to chikan work to supplement family's income without much hesitation.

Chikankari or chikanwork is embroidery done in silk or cotton on adhi muslin.[29] In this craft, no frame is used. The portion to be embroidered is placed by the artisan over the left hand index finger and kept tight with the help of other fingers while the thumb remains free. In making stitches, the needle is worked on the fabric by the right hand. The left thumb controls the thread and ensures correct shape of the pattern.

There are many patterns. Under muri pattern, the thread is sewn to produce an oblong raised lump in the shape of a small carrot. The second pattern called bakhis, is similar to muri but is much smaller and circular or squire-shaped. Then we have jal or network of holes made by drawing the threads of the muslin tightly together. Others are tuppa, a set of straight parallel stitches used in filling large pieces in the pattern, zanjirad, i.e. chain like stitches employed when long lines are required and pachri, or long continued lines.[30]

The fact that chikankari is still a thriving craft, can be established from the fact that as many as forty-five thousand persons are employed in this craft and out of these, thirty-one thousand, mostly pardanasheen women, live within municipal limits of Lucknow.

Kamdani and Zardozi

When chikankari is done in gold and silver threads, it is called kamdani. When done on velvet, it is called zardozi. Beautiful patterns of flowers, fruits, stars etc. were stitched in old days. A beautiful effect was produced by stitching a golden fruit out of a silver foliage. The petals were formed by working delicate spirals of gold thread while the stamens and pistil were represented by little circular spangles.[31] Kamdani and zardozi are, however, no longer popular. They lost their glory with the waning of feudalism.

Gold Lace

To make the patterns described above, wires drawn to an extreme tenuity, either plain or gilt, were used. In making wires from an ingot, the services of another set of craftsmen were required. The Hindu craftsmen were called patwas and Muslim artisans were known as ilaqeband. The principal products were known as lachka, kalabattu and lais (a corruption of lace).[32]

Bidriware

Originated in Bidar, the capital of Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan, this craft flourished under the Nawabs in Lucknow. Bidri is a kind of silverwork on certain polished surfaces, chiefly on hukkas, water bottles etc. The craft completely disappeared after fall of Nawabi rule. Although the British tried to revive it,[33] the industry has not survived.

Perfumes

Because of large scale use of itr by the royalty, nobility and gentry, perfume industry developed in Lucknow. The well known and popular varieties were hira, motiya, khas, bela, etc.[34] It was a part of Lucknow etiquette to offer or apply itr to the guests.

Shoe-making

A large number of shoe-makers were engaged in making shoes of leather, coated with embroidered velvet or brocade. The names of different footwears used in those days were, salim shahi, peshawari boot and ghetla.[35] The last mentioned was also used by ladies who later discarded it for tatbani (brocaded) shoes.[36] A type of shoes called khurdnav with a short toe cap was also very popular. The Shia ulema used the kafash, the Persian high heeled shoes.[37]

Lucknow had both Hindu and Muslim shoe-makers. The latter who were well off, made only ghetlas as they considered making of other types of shoes beneath their dignity.[38]

There were many craftsmen who earned their bread by making aughi i.e. embroidery in gold, silver and coloured threads used in shoe-making.[39]

Pottery and clay modelling

Lucknow's potters, both Hindu and Muslim (the Muslims were called Kasgars) were well known for the delicacy, beauty and superior quality of their products. Their products included pitchers, surahis, aabkhoras, Azimullah Khani huqqas, badhanis, plates, toys and show pieces as well as groups of figures besides models of villages, gatherings of courtesans, bhands etc. and assemblies of nobles.[40]

Tobacco Making

As both tobacco smoking and chewing were popular among the Lucknow's elite and common people alike, many skilled workers earned their living by preparing numerous varieties of khamira for smoking and zarda for chewing from tobacco.[41]

A large number of artisans were also engaged in many other crafts like silver-ware, brass-ware, ivory-carving, carpentry and wood carving. Shawl making too was a flourishing craft among the Muslim Kashmiri settlers of Lucknow.[42] Shawls were also distributed as gifts and presents by the royalty and nobility. Valentia, for instance, was given a gift of two shawls by the Nawab's mother.[43]

Lucknow soon acquired fame far and wide for the delicacy, fine work and beauty of its handicrafts which were also exported into British territories, Indian states and foreign countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

In a petition signed by about 50,000 people against annexation of Avadh, it was feared that 'the trade in embroidered silk, cotton cloth etc. and various other native manufactures, will be entirely stopped and thousands of artisans and workmen deprived of their daily bread.'[44] Their fears were not unfounded as later events clearly showed.

Besides these crafts, many local crafts had sprung up centering round sports, religious and ritual observances as well as social celebrations. Important among them were those connected with kite-flying and tazia-making.

We have already indicated that a large number of people from lower strata of society, were employed by the royalty, nobility and gentry. There were, of course, many more people besides the artisans who were self-employed. Some of them deserving mention, are nanbais, musicians, qawwals, naqqals, bhands, acrobats, tailors, animal and birds catchers and trainers, betel sellers, hookah bearers saqqas (water-carriers), fruit and vegetable vendors, masons, etc.

During the Nawabi days, there was a class of qauwals called Chhalabdars. They would put on wet cotton stuffed daglas (gowns), roll on burning coal and sing till the fire died down. This was called Chhanda. It was usually performed on fulfilment of a wish among the adherents of Ahmad Kabir. He was a Muslim saint who died in 752 A. H. His followers would vow to slaughter a cow if their wish was fulfilled by Ahmad Kabir. On fulfilment, the cow was slaughtered. Kababs prepared from its beef, too, were eaten by the Chhalabdars called to perform chhanda on the occasion.[45]

While dealing with funeral, we mentioned the shuhde who earned their living from funeral services. They, however, did not enjoy a good reputation. According to Agha Mehdi, 'it would not be proper to call them goondas. They would visit the deorhis of the nobility on occasions like death, birth, marriage to extract money by offering blessings and congratulations failing which by uttering ill words and Phabtis.'[46] Obviously, they were bad characters and bullies who earned their living by strong arm methods.

Then Lucknow had its version of knights at arms of England in middle ages. They were called banke (dandies) who were known for their chivalry and keeping of words. They would sport long hair so that their killers might not lift their head by ears when they were killed and would wear ghetla shoes so that they would not flee and show their backs to their enemies.[47] They wore kurtas made of fine muslin even during severest winter and considered it beneath their dignity to wear warm clothing. They had a mercurial temper and would draw out their swords on the slightest provocation.[48] Ghulam Hussain who is still remembered because of a small bridge situated between Chowk and Mansurnagar, named after him, was a reputed banka. Once he took a loan of five thousand rupees from a moneylender by mortgaging a little box with a bania who accepted it without ascertaining its content. After he had repaid the loan on the due date, he opened the box in the presence of the moneylender. It contained only a hair of his moustache.[49] However, Sarshar gives an entirely different picture of a banka in the post-Nawabi period. By that time, the banke had degenerated into bullies and anti-social elements who were a constant nuisance to law abiding people. He tells us story of a banka who would not pay the price of goods purchased by him. When the seller reminded to make the payment, it was taken to be an affront even by the ladies of his household who provoked a nephew, also a banka, to teach the seller the lesson of his life. This banka would have killed the seller but for the intervention of Azad, the hero of Fisanai Azad.[50]

Lucknow had yet another occupational i.e. inn keepers. There were many in inns called sarais, such as Sarai Afgha Mir, Neem Ki Sarai, Gadhi Ki Sarai, Sarai Hussainabad and Sarai Drigvijai Singh in Lucknow.

The Sarais were usually managed by Bhatiarins (i.e. female inn keepers) who were usually lewd and amoral and managed girls for the entertainment of their guests. The Bhatiarin of Sarai Agha Mir in the days of Amjad Ali Shah was a lady deft in dancing, singing, lewd and witty conversation, dirty jokes and quarrels. She had been earlier employed among the singers in the harem of Nasiruddin Haider. At the age of 35, she had a lover on whom she spent most of her earnings. She used to provide young and beautiful bhatiarins to serve her clients.[51] No wonder the bhatiarin is the heroine or the main character in making folktales and love stories of yore. Suroor talks of 'young and youngish Bhatiarins clothed in fine and neat dresses' while describing Lucknow.[52]

While on bhatiarins, it may be germane to mention that many self-employed females thrived in Lucknow. The hookah stalls where people could have a puff, were manned by female attendants called saqins. The presiding deity of pan shops was the tambolin i.e., female betel seller. Many fruit and vegetable sellers were female called Kunjaries who looked 'slantingly and their beauty made people speechless.'[53] Witty and vivacious young women sold bhang on earthen plates.[54] Older women clad in burqa, sold kurtis, dols, izarbands and thread.[55]

Then there were many people who followed what might be termed as gentleman's professions. Foremost among such callings was hikmat. The Unani hakims of Lucknow were famous throughout India. There were also khattat (caligraphers), painters, poets and dirge writers and teachers. They were handsomely paid and occupied a respectable position in society although some of them did not necessarily belong to the gentry.

Education

Education was mostly in private hands. Hindu students usually attended private schools run by the Brahmans and Kayasthas who taught Sanskrit and Persian both to the pupils. Maktabs were run by Muslim maulvis where Persian and Arabic were taught along with religious education. Many mosques were used as madarsas. English was not taught in any of these schools. Students learned Persian either from maulvis or Kayasthas. They were made to pay fee according to their means.[56] But many maktabs were maintained on charity also. The children of the royalty and nobility did not attend common schools but had their education from private tutors.

Higher religious education was imparted by Firangi Mahal and Royal College of Theology set up by Amjad Ali Shah as already described.

English education was imparted through two institutions, namely Christian Girls School and La Martinier College. The Avadh Government gave a grant of Rs. 200 per month to the girls' school. The La Martinier College was set up in 1833 to fulfil the wish of Claude Martin, a French adventurer, and later shifted to his palatial house called

Constantia. It was initially meant for European and Eurasian students and was financially supported by the Christian missionaries and the Resident who was the ex-officio Visitor and Governor of the institution. It had two departments of teaching, English and Oriental. The latter had seven teachers to teach Urdu, Arabic and Persian. It was only in the beginning of this century that Indian students were admitted in the college.[57] It still exists in its historical premises and is considered a prestigious institution.

It is thus, clear that during the Nawabi rule, Avadh and Lucknow did not have any organised educational system. In fact, despite facilities, the sons of the nobility did not pay serious attention to education and many of the nobles themselves were not educated at all.

Even during the post-Nawabi period, the maktabs and madarsas continued. Sarshar gives us an insight in the functioning of such a maktab. The maulvi incharge of the school, had little education, was fond of smoking huqqa and taking opium, while working. So while he dozed, the children played and shouted. When he woke up, he found it expedient to thrash the boys and thus start teaching. The charter of demands prepared by Azad, the hero of Fisanai Azad, throws considerable light on the pitiable condition of the maktabs. Here they are :

(1) The present timing of maktabs from sunrise to sunset, be changed from 10 A. M. to 4 P. M.

(2) Instead of having a class of forty students, divide them into four classes of ten students each.

(3) Introduce Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and History in the curriculum which consists of only literature.

(4) Stop the practices of reading aloud by students.

(5) Attention be paid to correct translation (of Arabic or Persian texts).

(6) Stop shaking of body by boys and maulvis while reading.

(7) Stop reading through the nose.

(8) Lay emphasis on explaining the text and spelling.

(9) Stop the practice of cramming.

(10) Translation from Urdu to Persian and vice-versa should be undertaken daily.

(11) Books should be selected for each child keeping in view his ability and talents.

(12) It is wrong to begin the education of a child with Persian. Instead, he should begin with Urdu.

(13) The maulvi should not ask boys to freshen huqqa and prepare chillam for him.

(14) Stop employing opium addicts as teachers.

No wonder, the maktabs were more of a mandi (market place) than a school.[58]

Even during the British rule, primary education was left to the care of the people. The Government however, themselves set up or gave grant-in-aid to establish middle schools. Initially the emphasis was to encourage education among the higher classes such as taluqdars and landed proprietors. In the Taluqdari schools set up under a scheme of grant-in-aid, there were two classes, higher for instruction of the privileged and the lower, for the lower classes. Later Zila Schools were established to prepare students for the Calcutta University Entrance Examination.[59] The present University of Lucknow, then Canning College, made its beginning as a first class Hindu School located in Aminabad Palace in 1864. Then it became the only college of Avadh to provide education above Entrance Examination level.[60]

The British Government considered it expedient to promote female education in Avadh through local initiative and Christian missions. There were eleven schools for girls in Lucknow in 1866, including Lucknow Girls' School opened in 1860 meant for Europeans and Eurasians exclusively. Of the remaining, five schools were run by the Church Mission Society and five by the American Mission.[61] In at least two schools, palanquins were used to fetch girls and take them back to their homes as they were pardanashin.[62] The Lucknow Zenana Mission, a branch of Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society of Calcutta, promoted literacy among the women teaching them in the Zenana itself.[63] Despite these measures, the progress of education especially among the Muslim women, remained very poor because of stiff opposition by men.

Lucknow's economy

The main sources of income of the Nawabi government were land revenues, market-tax, custom duties, road duties, pilgrim taxes and other miscellaneous sources such as nazars. Of these, the principal source was land revenue which was nearly 1.60 crores of rupees in 1844-45.[64] Most of the income, therefore, poured into the coffers of state from rural areas and contribution of Lucknowites themselves was rather negligible.

Among the items of expenditure by the State, were civil salaries, pensions, maintenance of royal army, cattle and kitchen, King's private expenses, construction works, distribution of khillats, rewards etc. Therefore, except for pension to distant pensioners living outside Lucknow and salaries to civil servants and army personnel coming from rural areas and a few other items such as purchase of imported goods,[65] most of the income of the Kingdom was spent within the four walls of Lucknow city and in a much smaller fraction in Faizabad. Following the pattern of Lucknow, other towns too owed their prosperity to the taluqdars and zamindars.

Except for production of handicrafts and cottage industries, Lucknow had no other productive activities with the result that Lucknow subsisted almost wholly on the income gathered from rural areas. Naturally, the nobility had the lion's share of this income, Roshan-ud-daulah, the Prime Minister of Nasiruddin Haider, got a salary of Rs. 25,000 per month and a commission of 15 per cent on the actual revenues collected.[66] But then the life-style of royalty and nobility was such that most of their income trickled down through the numerous serving people, courtesans and entertainers as well as purchases, celebrations, etc. The result was that a large chunk of the income was spent within Lucknow itself. According to Sleeman 'rulers of Avadh spend all they can spare for the public in gratifying the vitiated tastes of the overgrown metropolis'.[67] Therefore, most of the people lived an easy life. If there were beggars, they were creatures of circumstances.

This does not however, mean there was no indebtedness or poverty. In a society given to extravagant living money lending was a flourishing trade as already mentioned. Tennaunt found the life of the lower classes including artisans miserable in 1799.[68]

Many people in higher echelon of life, borrowed from moneylenders and bankers to pay king's dues and to maintain their traditional standard of living. Borrowing by nobility and gentry became very common during the post-Nawabi period, when most of the sources of income dried up but the aristocratic families stuck to their traditional extravagant living unmindful of the consequences. The following is the portrait of a Nawab in the second half of the nineteenth century. 'He has become bankrupt and his whole property is mortgaged . . . . His large establishment vanishes by degrees and mortgaged property is sold by auction . . . . Soon they drag him to the jail. After a period he comes out of jail and he is an altered man. He takes to begging or fakir's life or goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Karbala.[69] This certainly did not apply to majority or even a sizeable fraction of the nobility but nevertheless quite a few of such families, having no alternate source of income, had to face humiliation and ruination. The gentry faced a worse lot. According to Pictorial Lucknow there were very few Muslims among the middle classes. They were identified by their 'old carriages, ragged shawls and dilapidated houses.'[70]

The Market Place

When Asafuddaulah shifted his capital to Lucknow from Faizabad, Lucknow did not have a large market. Even towards the end of his rule, Lucknow was not a large shopping centre by western standards. The show of rich shops and merchandise is remarkably small though it supplied the luxury of the court or rather the palace . . . . Thus comments Tennaunt on Lucknow's market of 1799.[71] However, the city and its markets grew rapidly. Years later F.J. Shore drew an entirely different picture of Lucknow's market place. In his notes on Indian Affairs, he says 'Look at the bazars not only in Lucknow but in any town in the country. They are filled with far more numerous and expensive articles than those of corresponding size in our own territories.'[72]

The description of Lucknow's market-place handed down to us by Suroor, provides interesting details of the bazar, its crowds and brisk business.

The hubbub of all commercial activities was the Chowk. While the main bazar lay between Akbari Gate built by Kazi Mohammad Bilgrami during Akbar's reign and Goldarwaza, the commercial establishments extended beyond the two gates. From Akbari Gate till Pukka Pul, it was a perfect straight line.[73] The shops of one type of commodities were constructed in a particular block. When one entered the market, through the Goldarwaza, one came across the saraffa i.e. the market of precious metals and ornaments. There are heaps of gold coins in front of saraffs dressed in puffed pyajamas with turbans on. They exhibit a curious mixture of moonga, moti (pearls), almas (diamond), zamurrad (emerald), yaqut, pukhraj (topaz) and neelam (sapphire),[74] The bazaza consisted of cloth shops. They contained stuffs from Varanasi, Dacca, Gujarat, China and Lucknow's own products such as chikan, kamkhwab, printed and embroidered stuff as well as garha and gazzi. Later in the days of Amjad Ali Shah, English and French dress materials were to be seen in abundance.[75] Both in saraffa and bazaza, the shopkeepers employed dalals (touts) who had developed an instinct and expertise to guess the requirements of customers.[76]

There was a separate section for shops of goldsmiths who made beautiful ornaments from gold and silver and set precious stones in ornaments and rings. Then there were shops of intoxicants such as bhung, opium and tobacco usually manned by smartly dressed women.[77]

One of the main attractions of the Chowk were eatables. While it was not considered decent to eat at the shop, it was deemed to be quite in order and even fashionable, at least among the gentry and the lower classes, to purchase foodstuffs and take them home. The person who cooked and sold food, was known as nanbai (literally breadmaker). Suroor talks of 'well mannered nanbais whose preparations were so tempting that if an angle passed by, after a full meal, he would feel hungry.'[78] They sold several varieties of chapatis and nans, pulao, zarda, quarma, kabab, biryani, nahari, etc.[79] Then there were confectioners, both Hindu and Muslim, but the Hindu halwais were better than their Muslim counterparts. However, there were many sweets such as jalebi, barfi, balushahi, khurma, gulabjamun, dar behistit etc, which were developed during Muslim rule in India.[80] Suroor mentions many other sweets such as halua-sohan, habshi halua, dudhia, papri, imarti and jalebi. Many types of chutneys, pickles and trays of balai (cream) were also on sale.[81]

On the pavement infront of these shops, were sold the sweet dishes of firni, kheer and falooda in earthen plates, all scented with arq-e-quera or arq-e-gulab.[82] There were also sellers of Nimish qulfies. Even parched grains such as murmure and parmal were on sale.[83]

Muslim saqqas carried about katoras and leather bags filled with cold water quenching the thirst of the thirsty on a nominal payment.[84] Hindu watermen carried cold water in buckets.[85]

Then there were the stalls of dry and fresh fruit with attractive young women as sales girls. Pedlars moved about selling dalmoth, reori and gram. Fresh flowers and garlands were sold by hawkers with flowery slogans.[86]

Near Akbari Gate were located shops dealing in handicrafts, earthen ware, huqqas and toys which were the speciality of Lucknow,

In fact the Chowk presented scenes of fair. There were brisk sales of pigeons, parrots, mynahs, neelkanths, partridges, baters, poultry and even barbari goats. Considerable emphasis was laid and discussions were held on the pedigree of birds.[87]

The story tellers were found telling stories to eager gatherings. Naqqals and acrobats staged demonstration to amuse people. Mushairas in which ghazals, wasokht, hijo etc. were recited in an informal and sometimes amusing manner, were in session here and there.[88]

The turbaned huqqa bearers moved to and fro between the two gates offering smoke to the citizens who paid them in keeping with their status.[89]

As already stated, the courtesans had their apartments on the first floor of the buildings of Chowk. Meticulously dressed, people would in the Chowk in evenings, exchange glances with courtesans or pay a visit to a favourite courtesan. It was the Chowk and the courtesans which made Sham-e-Avadh (Evenings of Avadh) so famous all over India.

The bazar became so much crowded in the afternoons that restrictions were placed on movement of horse driven carriages.[90] The members of the aristocracy visited the Chowk on horseback, elephants or in palanquins.[91] The Chowk of Nawabi days was noted for its bankers, goondas, courtesans, dalals and spectators.[92] According to the District Gazetteer, at the fall of Nawabi rule, 'Lucknow was one of the most flourishing towns in India. The central part was densely populated and the scenes on the principal streets were mostlively.'[93]

The annexation and the events of 1857 gave a severe jolt and setback to Lucknow and its population and prosperity. But in a few years the city had regained much of its lost glory.

From Sarshar, we got a portrait of the Chowk in post-Nawabi period, in second half of nineteenth century. The arrangement of shops and stalls had not undergone any noticeable change. The bazars, however, had much more stocks of English cloth. The dalals were as active as in Nawabi days. There was much bargaining between shopkeepers and purchasers. 'If they quote price of ten rupees a yard, for a piece of cloth, they would ultimately sell it for five rupees a yard'. It was however, a general feeling that the city was much more prosperous and populated during the Nawabi period.[94]

Mirza Jaffar Husain and Josh Malihabadi recall the Chowk of early twentieth century. According to Mirza Jaffar Husain, the Chowk continued to be the centre of Lucknow's old culture, handicrafts, fine arts, poetry and literature. It was considered indecent to eat anything in the market. He and other boys would buy barfis and eat them in the dark behind a wall, so as not to be noticed. The shopkeepers were continuing the practice of beginning the day by saying :

If one does not get from Maula
He gets from Asafuddaulah.[95]

In the middle of the Chowk, there was the merchandise shop of Sheikh Tajdar Mirza, where many old poets and men of letters would gather every evening.[96]

The Mirza laments that gone are the delicious foods and sweets and their aroma. Though their names linger the tastes are gone for ever.[97]

Josh remembers the beautiful clay toys on sale near the Akbari Gate with nostalgia. 'If I went near the Gujari it would begin to dance. If I touched the saqqas, their leather bags would begin to pour water.'[98] The saqis and sagins were serving their clients with huqqas decorated with wreaths of flowers and filled with scented tobacco. The qulfis served in delicate earthen plates were a craze. The dancing girls still carried on their profession from the Kothas of the Chowk. People continued to move in the Chowk with their eyes turned to those beautiful specimens God's creatures and made polite excuses on barging into each other. Even well-to-do families usually supplemented their meals with a few items purchased from the Chowk, 'When night set in, our dinner consisted of puris and kachauris from Abdullah, baqarkhanis from Ahmad's, shirmals from Saadat's, eighteen layer parathas from Shabrati, roasted chicken of Jhumman, bater pulao of Shahid, pine apple muzafar from the lane of Gate of Haider Husain Khan, kababs from the Ghulam Husain Khan Ka Pul, sweets from Kaptan Ka Kuan and cream from Husainabad etc. besides the food prepared by our cook.'[99]

We also came across a contemporary account of the Chowk of the post-Nawabi period by an Englishman. Some of the jewelleries and other precious possession of the royalty and nobility had reached the shops of the Chowk. 'Here the peripatetic purchaser may come upon treasure trove in the form of rare old silver, genuine early Lucknow enamel and characteristic jewellery, are the property of the prodigal kings and their much indulged queens.'[100] About the stalls, Newell says 'Either side of the way is crowded with booths. the entire length of the bazar. Their contents are as unexpected as they are varied. Glass and metal bangles jostle each other in glittering rivalry, their charms paling before those of the beaded, jewelled and embroidered caps and slippers for which Lucknow is famous. Hookahs too make seductive appeal to lovers of the fragrant weed . . . pyjama belts skilfully contrived from silken thread in brilliant shades of magenta, royal blue and olive green, dangle-dazzling gold and silver tassles to catch the eyes, 'en passant'. There are clay figures and fruit, perfumes . . . characteristic jewellery and Bidari work equal to that of Damascus. In addition there are many hued saris, all sorts of needle-crafts, brass and copper vessels and a thousand and one things new to the Western eyes.'[101]

The atmosphere of the Chowk, the nerve centre of the city, as depicted both by Indians and Europeans goes to show that the people especially the gentry, following in the footsteps of the nobility, loved an easy going and lazy life. They spent long hours in the Chowk in making purchases, exchanging glances with courtesans and visiting their Kothas or merely in strolling the streets.

When education was not common, it is not surprising that the people were sunk in ignorance and superstitions. Because of Sufi influence both, Sunnis and Shias believed in grave worship, mannats, urs and qawwalli. They had their peers whose dictates they followed. Maulana Dildar Ali however, severely attacked Sufism in his treatise, Shaheb-e-Saqib and under his influence, the Shias gave up many of the practices and rituals mentioned adove.

We also find that most of the people including lower classes, were underemployed. The laziness and idleness of the rich had permeated down to the poorest who worked only to make both ends meet. It was customary for common people to indulge in many bazis, then current in Lucknow, such as kite flying, bater and partridge fights and keeping of pigeons and other birds. People thronged in melas and religious gatherings which were frequently held. They would smoke huqqas, chew tobacco and eat pan and gossip with friends and neighbours for hours. It was common to take opium. Many also used drugs like bhang, charas and ganja. Tennaunt found many people 'in a state between existence and annihilation'.[102] Many were 'intoxicating themselves with the hookas. Only a few laboured at their profession'.[103] Drinking was, however, not common. It was confined to the elite. But many visited the kothas of courtesans of the class they could afford.

Every one spoke chaste Urdu. Many Hindus were learned in Persian and wrote books in that language, Urdu poetry became the passion of the people. Mushairas were held in every nook and corner, melas and homes. Versification was not the monopoly of the poets alone. Many people lettered or unlettered, composed verses. Almost every one cited verses in conversation. Urdu also became the language of songs sung on occasions connected with life-cycle rituals in all homes irrespective of caste or creed. Urdu thus became the common heritage of all residents of Lucknow whether Hindus, Shias or Sunnis and the most outstanding manifestation of a composite and mosaic culture. If we go through the writings, both prose and poetry, of that period, it is not easily possible to detect whether the writer was Hindu, Shia or Sunni. There is still a controversy whether the poet Dilgir was a Hindu or a Muslim.

It is thus, clear that during the Nawabi rule, Lucknow and its inhabitants from top to the base, prospered to a greater or lesser degree. People did not like to work hard to eke out a living. So they chose to be underemployed, lazing and idlers. They lived beyond their means and many, not only the poorest but also some members of the propertied classes, were indebted. Thus money lending became a prosperous business. It has to be emphasized that the money that poured into the royal coffers and most of which was passed on to the common people of Lucknow, was far in excess of the normal requirements of Lucknow. True, there was no fair distribution of wealth and there were economic imbalances but even then, indebtedness was not always caused by poverty but usually by individual recklessness and extravagance. In this life of ease, comfort, and underemployment, it is not surprising if the Lucknowites excelled in manners, etiquette, politeness, sophistication, poetry and music for which Lucknow is still reputed. Louis Rousselet in his book first published in 1882, remarks that 'the inhabitants of Lucknow are generally of a mild and even effeminate disposition. They are great lovers of pleasures and amusements and passionately cultivate poetry and singing'[104] However, with the end of Nawabi rule, the main source of patronage dried up resulting in wide-spread unemployment and misery. But fortunately the British continued to uphold the Taluqdari system with the result that after a few years of turmoil, the nobles having landed property, taluqdars and begums emerged as agencies which provided employment and patronized fine arts, including poetry, singing and dancing.

It is thus, clear that the royalty of Avadh had close links direct or through the nobility, with its subjects living within the limits of Lucknow town, who were distinctly pampered and favoured in comparison to the rural folk who toiled hard to eke out a living for themselves and to pay rent to the establishment which sustained and provided succour to the royalty, nobility, gentry and the common folk of Lucknow who paid almost no taxes. As a result a living and affectionate ralationship developed between Kings of Avadh and the Lucknowites. The importance and preference given to Shias in general and Shia clergy in particular by the rulers, fitted in the feudal set up and was in keeping with the tradition of the ruling classes in India and were, therefore, not questioned on grounds of principle although on specific issues, disputes arose specially between Shias and Sunnis. Having no responsibility of defence, the kings and nobles of Avadh had enough time to devote to religious, social and cultural activities. In this atmosphere, the royalty was naturally the trend and tune setter but that strikes and impresses us in retrospect in the fact, the royalty too exposed itself to indigenous influences in literature, music, architecture and other fine arts as well as religious practices and rituals. The result was development of a composite and mosaic culture which permeated all sections of Lucknowites irrespective of their caste, community or creed. The people intermingled freely and became part of one cultural stream. While people could be distinguished in professional groups it was difficult to identify their religion or caste as they all spoke the same language and followed a common etiquette. The people, on the whole, had leisure and loved to enjoy life through the many pastimes and sports developed during those days. The society was not only free from religious bigotry but was distinctly secular and religious practices and rituals were so modified and Indianized as to be acceptable to the different religious groups living in Lucknow. However, in socio-political hierarchy, not only Shias but Hindus too had an edge over the Sunnis who felt the pinch especially because they were rulers elsewhere. However, with the Muslim rule tattering everywhere, they accepted their assigned positions with good grace and made important contributions in the socio-cultural life of Avadh. Because of historical factors, socio-economic matrix and the attitude of Avadh royalty and nobility, the culture of Lucknow laid more emphasis on finesse, sophistication, manners and appearance than on content character, personality and behaviour. This situation was gladly accepted by the people because it fitted in the all pervading atmosphere of indolence, carefreeness and certainty of daily bread. It was, therefore, basically a palace, parish or manor culture which was bound to perish with the fall of the economic system that provided succour to its people.

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GLOSSARY

Abkhora	A tumbler or goblet made of clay used for drinking water.
Ahle Bait	Literally, people of the house, family members.
Ali	Hazrat Ali, Son-in-law of the Prophet
Amil	Collector of revenue
Arqe Gulab	Rose water
Arqe Keora	Scented extract from Keora leaves.
Ashura	The first ten days of Muharram
Atash (Atish) baz	Manufacturer of fire works.
Aulia	Holymen, saints
Azim-ullah Khani Huqqa	A simple hubble bubble associated with the name of Azim-ullah Khan, a royal barber
Bater	A kind of quail
Badhana	A drinking water vessel with a snout
Baradari	A hall with twelve gates
Basant	Spring season, spring songs
Batashe	A cookie from sugar, bonbon
Bazaza	Cloth market
Bazi	Play, game
Begum	A title of respect for Muslim ladies, originally used by Mughal women only.
Bhairvi	A song sung early in the morning.
Bhand	Mimic, actor, jester by profession
Bhang	Hemp, an intoxicant
Bhishti	Water bearer
Biryani	A dish of fried rice and meat, a variety of pulao,
Burqah	Muslim women's veil
Chakla	District
Chakladar	District officer
Chameli	Jasmine
Chapati	Thin and round unleavened Indian bread baked on a hot plate.

Chatni	An acidic sauce, chutney
Chaubola	A verse of four lines.
Chauk, Chowk	A square place in a city around which shops are located
Chauka	Cubical slabs
Chauthi	Ceremony after the fourth day of marriage
Chhatti	Ceremony performed after sixth day of child-birth
Chillam	An earthen container for burning charcoal and tobacco placed on the top of the hookah.
Chini bagh	Chinese garden.
Chit lagan	Pleasing to heart.
Dalal	Tout
Dalmoth	A spicy snack prepared from pulses
Dargah	A shrine
Dastan	Fable, story
Ghazal	A form of poetry
Goonda	A bad character
Gopi	Milkmaid
Gulab	Rose
Gujari	A female cowherd
Hadis	Traditional sayings of the Prophet
Hadiskhwan	Narrator of hadis
Hakim	A practitioner of Unani system of medicine
Hazal	A form of humorous and sarcastic poetry.
Hijo	A form of verse composed to decry a person.
Hikmat	Practice of Unani form of medicine
Hookah	Hubble bubble
Idgah	A large mosque where Id prayers are held
Indra (Indira) Sabha	Assembly of Lord Indra
Ijtihad (Ijtihad)	Waging a religious war, care, effort, office or authority of a mujtahid
Izarband	Pyjama belt
Darogha	Supervisior
Dastango	Story-teller
Dastarkhwan	Dining table cloth
Dhari	A caste of singers
Diwan	Collected ghazals of a poet
Doli	A simple type of palanquin, a litter

Dom	A caste of singers
Domini	Female Dom
Doshala	A large shawl
Duff	A kind of little tambourine
Dupatha	A cloth wrapper to cover female chest
Fakir	Beggar, mendicant
Falooda	A kind of flimmery
Farsh	Floor, cloth spread on the floor
Fatwa	A religious order or decision
Finus	Elaborate form of a palanquin.
Firni	A sweet preparation from rice and milk.
Jagir	Estate
Jannat	Paradise
Janamashtmi	Birthday of Lord Krishna
Jhanjh	A musical instrument
Jhol	Body clothes of an animal
Kahar	Palanquin bearer
Kakri	A variety of Cucumber
Kalabattu	Gold or silver thread
Kalam	Poetic piece
Kamrup	Ancient name for a portion of present day Assam known for its beautiful women
Katora	A water tumbler
Ketki	A kind of flower
Khalifa	Caliph
Khalifai Waqt	Present day caliph
Khamira	A type of tobacco syrup
Khatna	Circumcision
Kheer	Sweetened rice boiled in milk
Khillat	Robe of honour
Khuntiyan	Also reori, a type of toffee
Khutba	Prayer offered in mosques on Fridays for the reigning King.
Krishna	Well known Hindu God
Kotha	Upper storey of a house
Kothi	Mansion of the elite

Lachka	A gold or silver lace
Langar	Public Kitchen
Maafi	Rent free estate
Madarsa	School
Mahtab	Moonshine
Majnu	A mad person, lover of Laila
Mamlabandi	Narration of intimate moments of sex
Mamtua	Married through muta
Mannat	A vow
Manqabat	Verse of praise
Marsiya	Poetry of lament
Masnavi	A form of poetry
Masnad	A kind of large pillow or cushion
Matam	Mourning, grief
Matia burj	A place located in the suburbs of Calcutta
Matba	Press
Maula	A lord
Maulana	Our Lord
Maulvi	A doctor of Islamic Law
Mehrtan	A woman with a moon-like body
Menhdi	Henna
Mohalla (Mahalla)	Ward, a part of town
Mufti	A law officer
Mujtahid	One who strives hard to acquire correct and sound views
Mujtahidul Asr	Present day Mujtahid
Mujra	A form of dance
Mulla	A priest
Muradabadi	Belonging to Muradabad, a town of U.P. famous for brassware
Muta	Temporary marriage under Muslim Law.
Naib	Deputy
Najaf	A city in Syria where tomb of Hazrat Ali is located
Nahari	Breakfast
Namsh	Whipped cream
Nan	Leavened bread
Nanbai	Breadmaker, cook
Nauha	Dirge

Naqqals	Mimics, another name of Bhands
Nazim	A registrar, governor
Nazir	A seer, superintendent
Nazrana	Offering
Niaz	Desire, name of a ceremony in which recitation from the Koran is read over food for the soul of relatives.
Nikah	Muslim Marriage
Paan	Betel leaf folded in a conical shape
Pahar	A division of time consisting of three hours
Palkee	Palanquin
Patka	A cloth girdle or belt
Peer	Spiritual leader
Phanoos	A glass chimney, shade or covering
Puja	Hindu form of worship
Pulao	A dish of rice fried in soup, meat spices etc.
Purdah	Curtain
Purdah-nashin	One who sits behind the curtain, one who observes purdah
Qasida	A kind of ode
Qurmah	A meat dish
Qauwal	Singer
Qauwali	Act of singing
Qibla	The temple of Kaaba in Mecca, a term used for a respectable elder or superior
Qulfi	A form of ice cream
Rabiulauwal	Third month of Hijra era
Rafzi	A heretic, applied to Shias by some
Raga	Musical tune
Ragini	Feminine form of raga, to express technically less vigorous versions of raga.
Ragmala	A treatise on music
Rahas	Enjoyment, merriment, a type of dramatic performance
Rajab	Seventh month of Hijra era
Ranga	Tin
Rangili	Colourful, gay
Rasaldar	Commander of a troop of horsemen
Reori	A kind of toffee, same as Khuntiyan

Roshan Chauki	A kind of musical band
Sabeel	Water distributed to the thirsty.
Sabura	Artificial male organ
Safar	Second month of Hijra era
Salam	Islamic form of salutation
Sarangi	A stringed musical instrument with a round body and wide neck
Sarrafa	Money exchangers' market, bullion market
Sarkar	Government
Savana	Fifth month of Vikram era; song sung during Savana
Shagird	Pupil, follower
Shahi	Royal
Shairi	Poetry
Shaluka	A kind of ladies' coat
Shariat	Law
Sontabardar	Bearer of stick or mace
Soz	Lament
Subedar	Governor of a province
Subedari	Governorship of a province
Sultanul Ulema	King of the learned
Surahi	A narrow necked earthen flask
Suryabansi	Descendants of the sun
Taburruk	Sacred relic, Sanctified food
Tahsildar	Collector
Takhallus	Titular name assumed by a poet
Takhat	A large rectangular or square plank of wood supported by four low legs
Tasha	A kind of drum
Turhi	A kind of trumpet
Ustad	Teacher
Valmiki	Author of Ramayana
Vizier	Minister, Chief administrator
Wasiqadar	Endowment-holder
Zakat	Alms
Zarda	A sweet rice dish
Zenana	Female quarters
Ziarat	Pilgrimage
Zilhij	Last month of Hijra era

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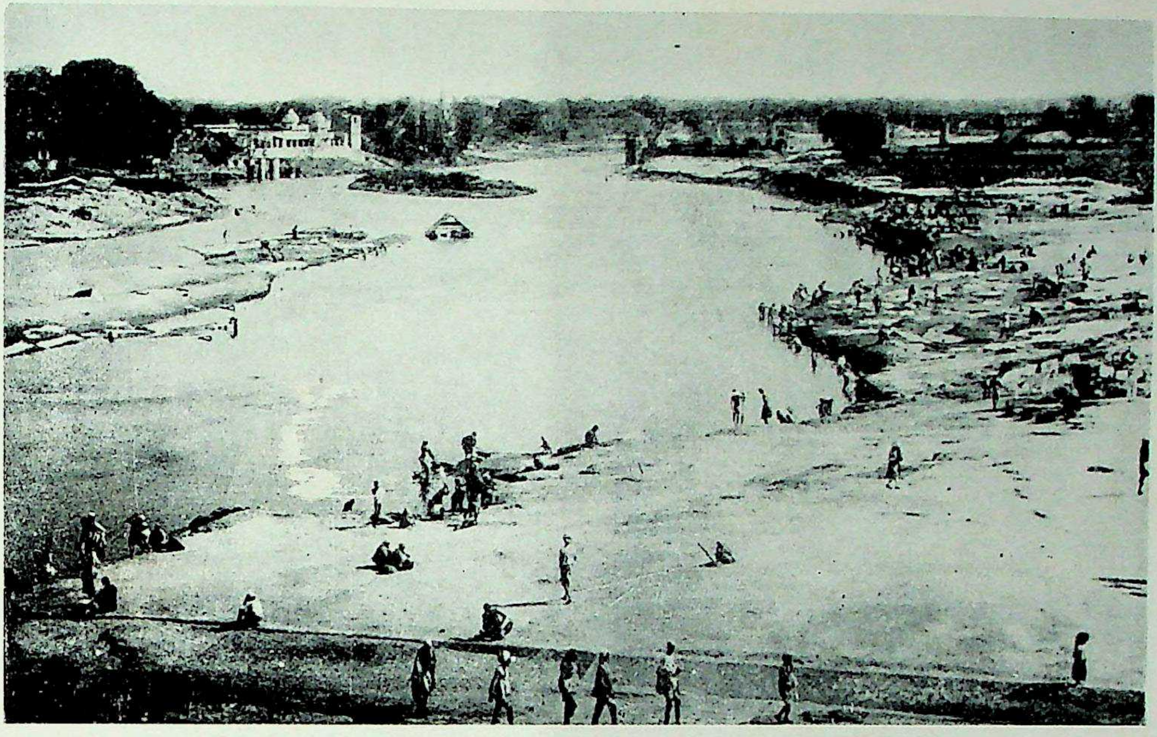
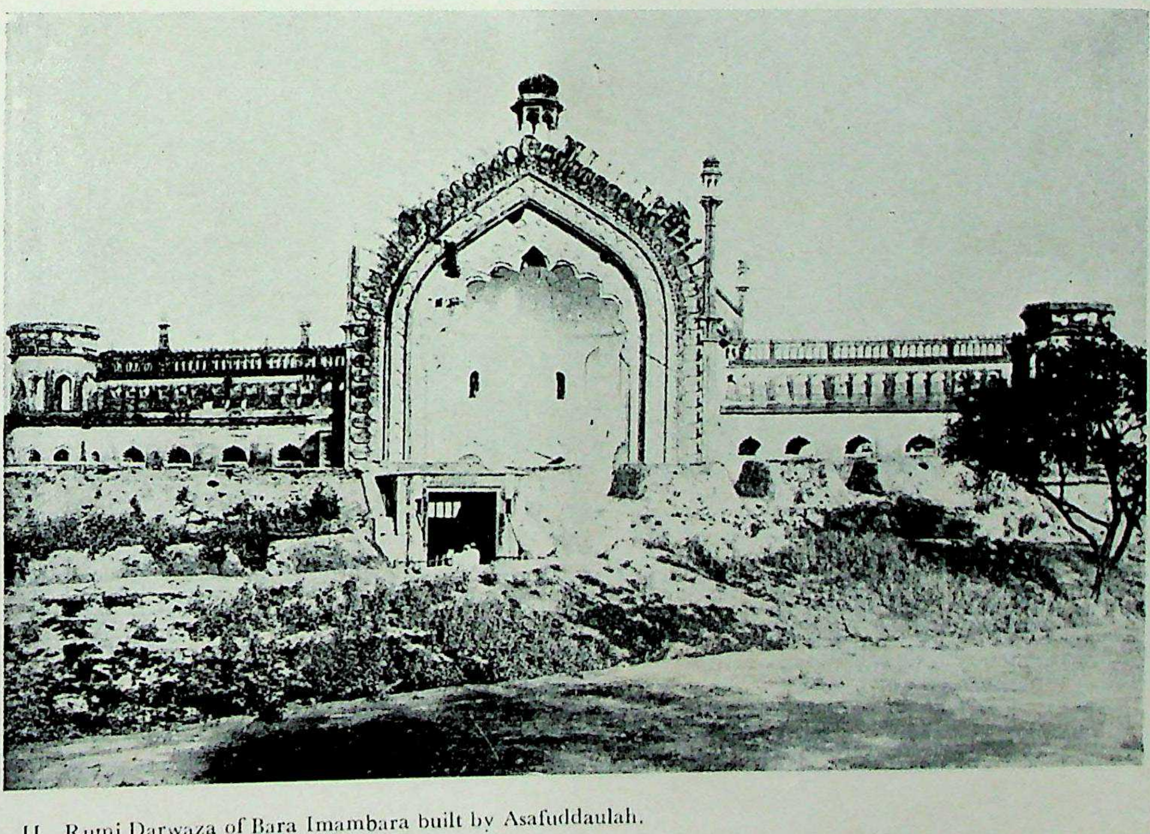
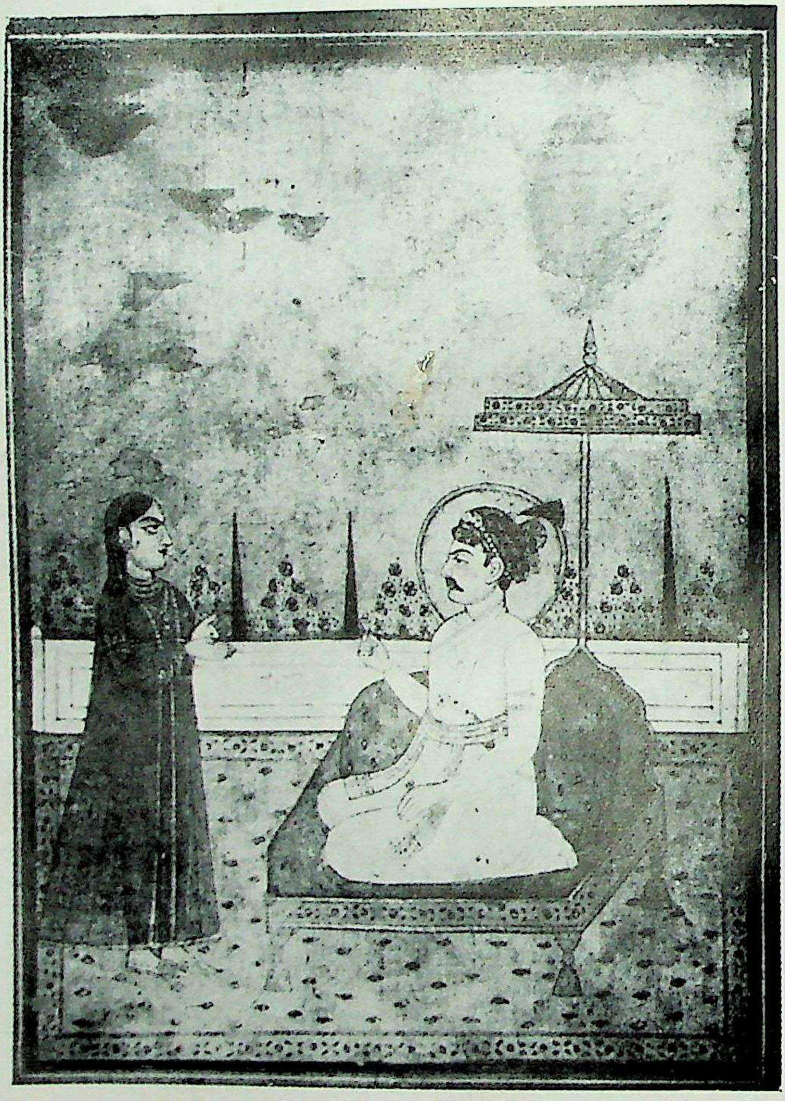


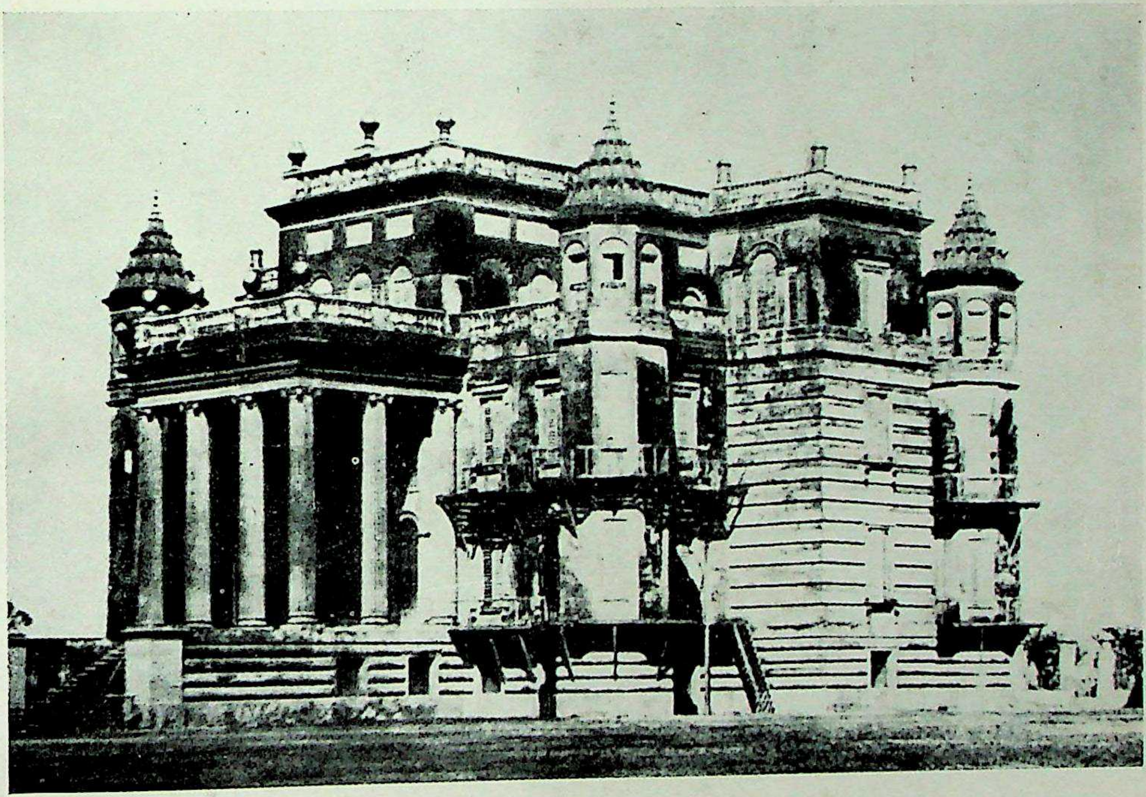
I A view of river Gomti from Machhi Bhawan (1910 A.D.)



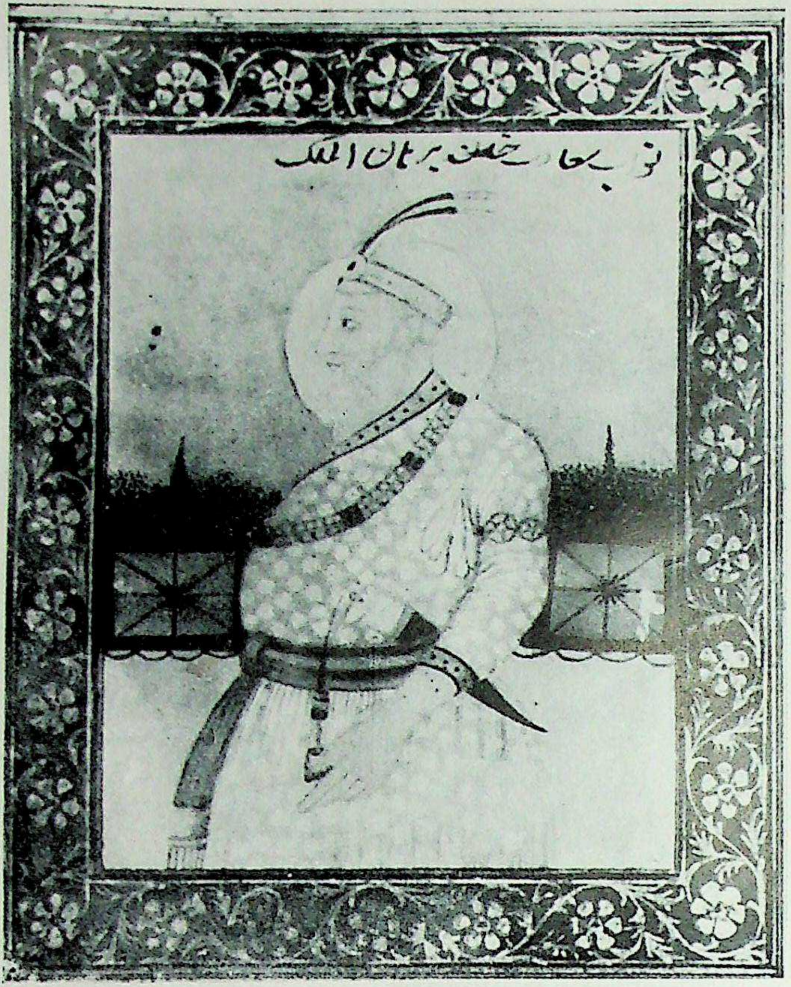
II Rumi Darwaza of Bara Imambara built by Asafuddaulah.



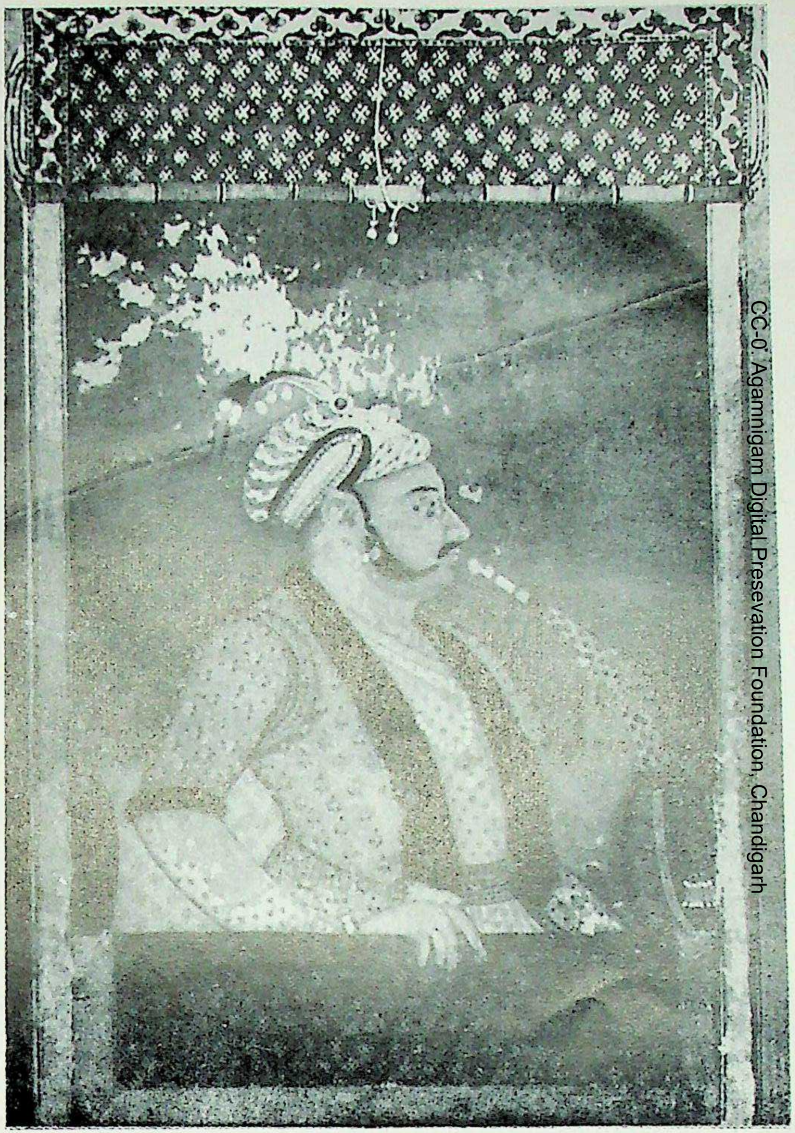
III Raja Tikait Rai (From an eighteenth century portrait).



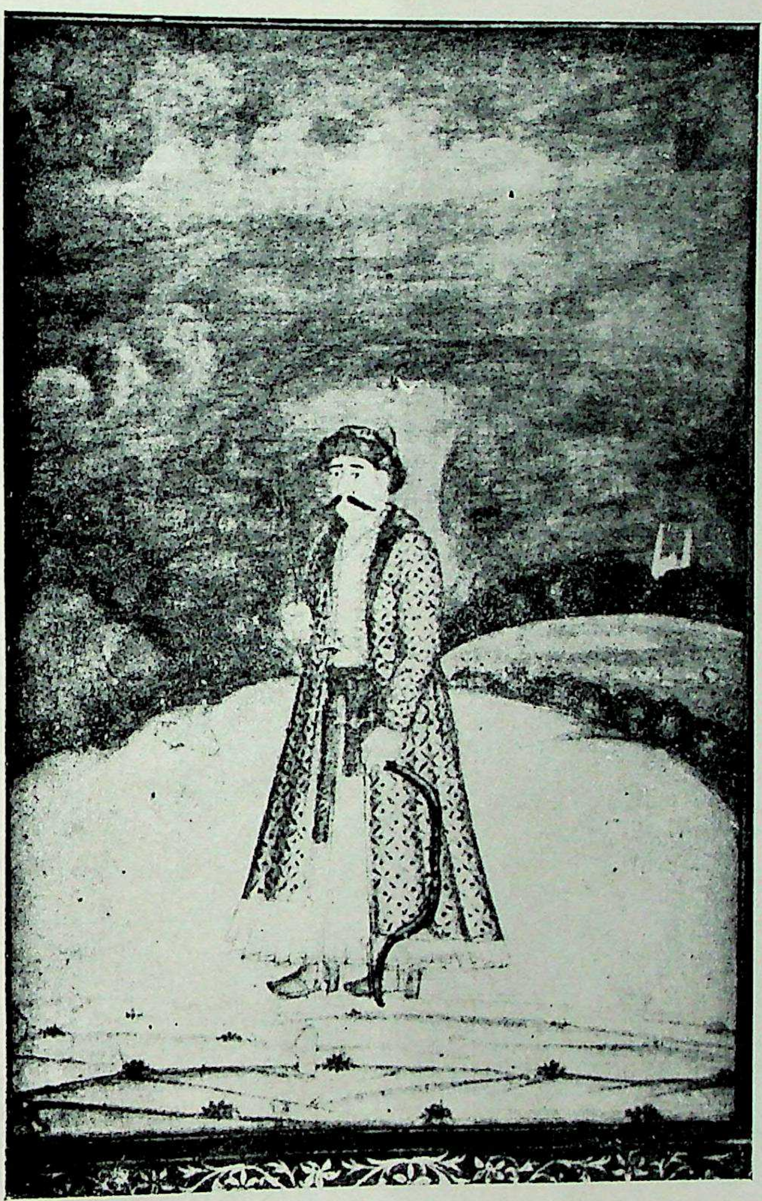
IV Dilkusha Palace, now in ruins.


نواب سعادت خان برہان الملک

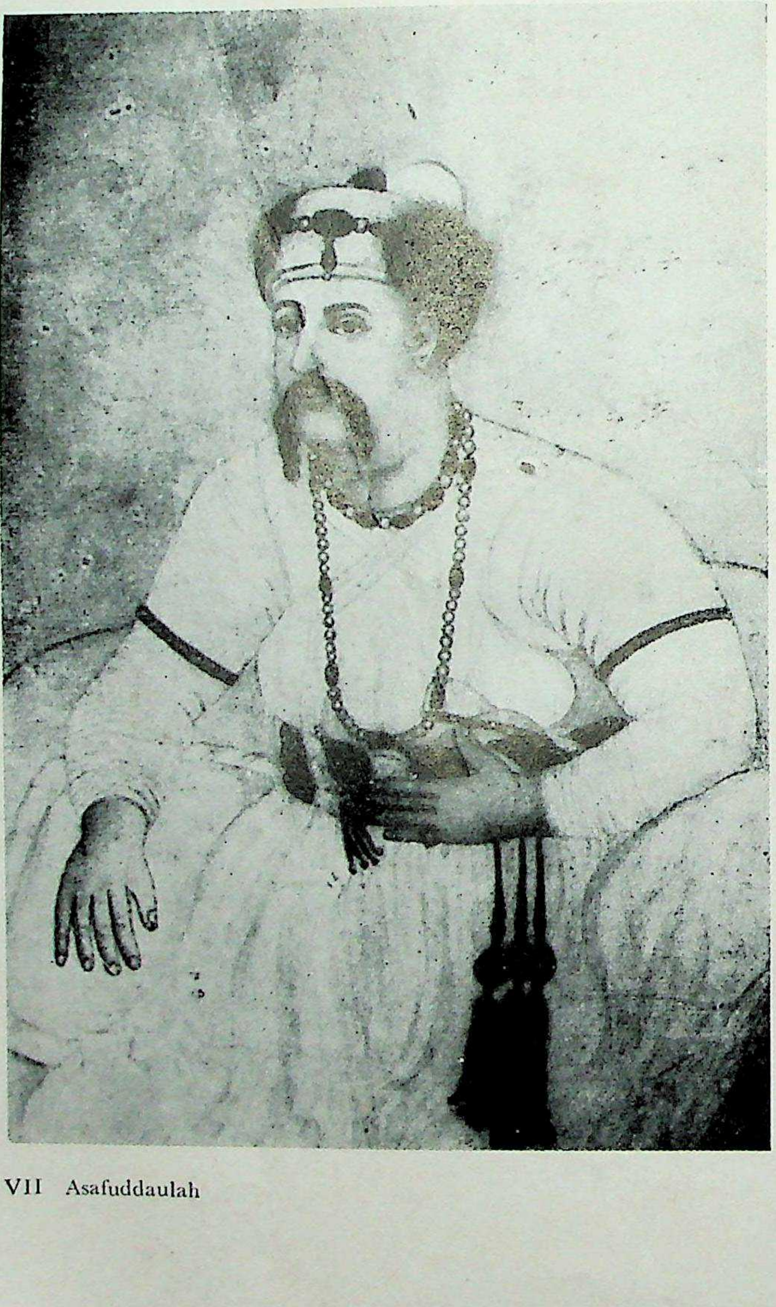
V Nawab Saadat Khan Burhanul Mulk, the founder of Avadh Rule.



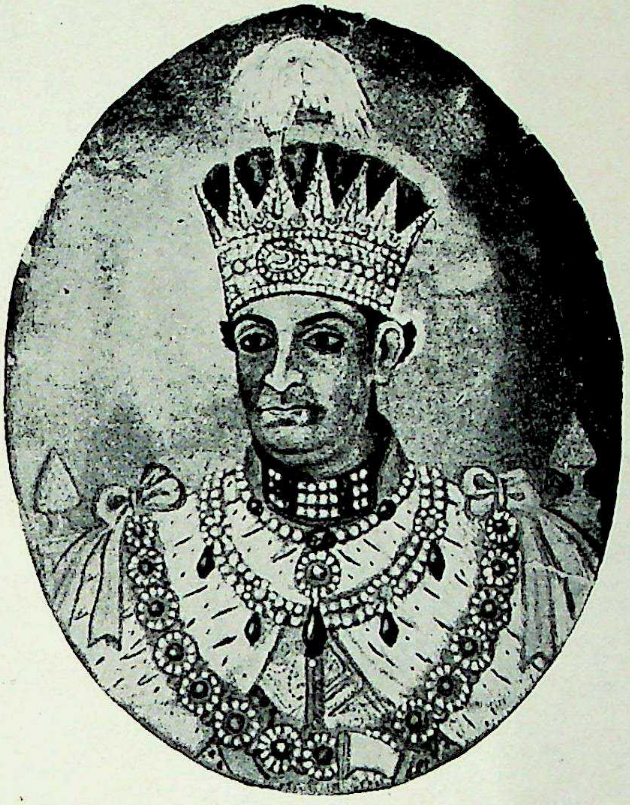
V A Raja Nawal Rai, Deputy of Safdar Jang. →



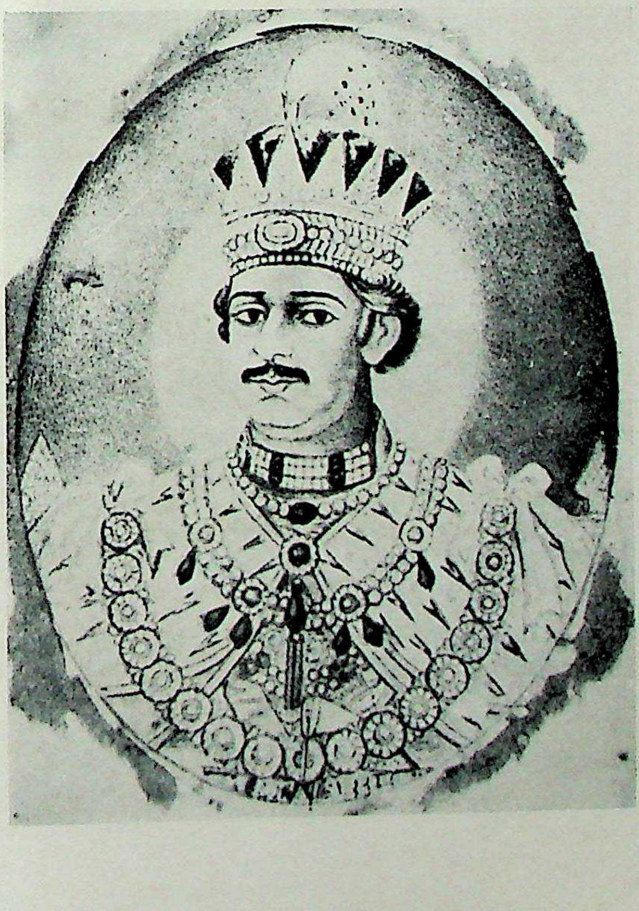
VI Shujauddaulah



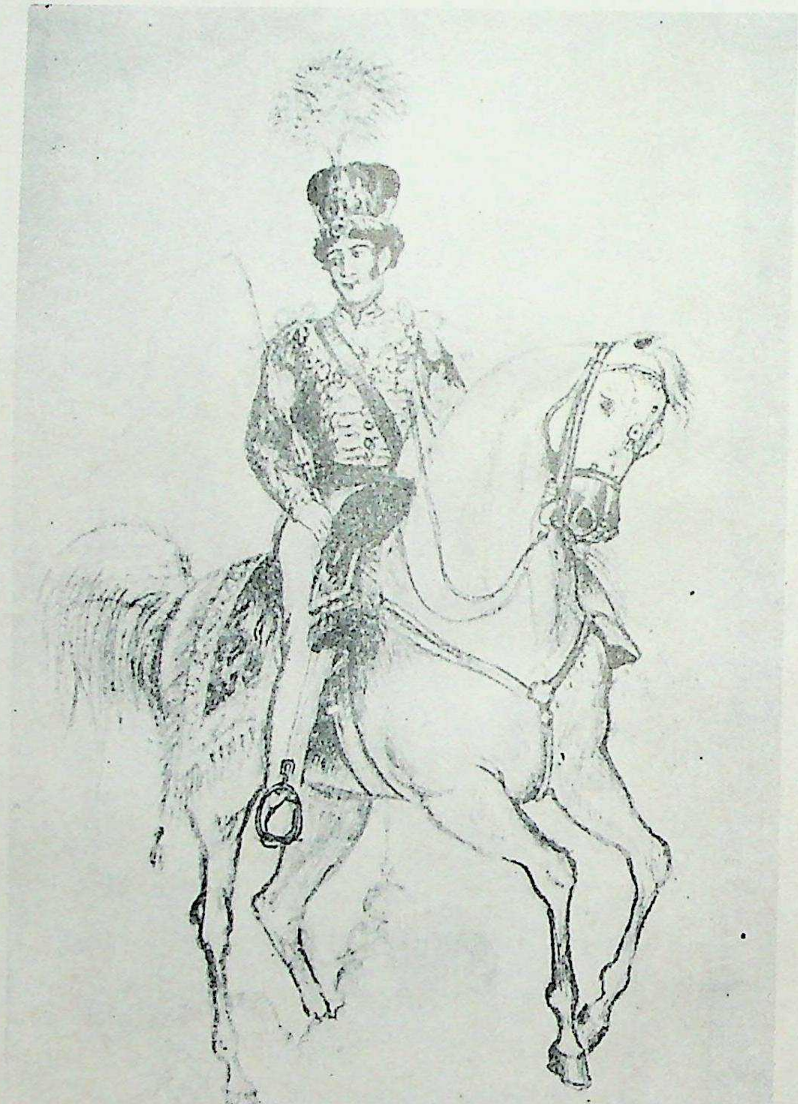
VII Asafuddaulah



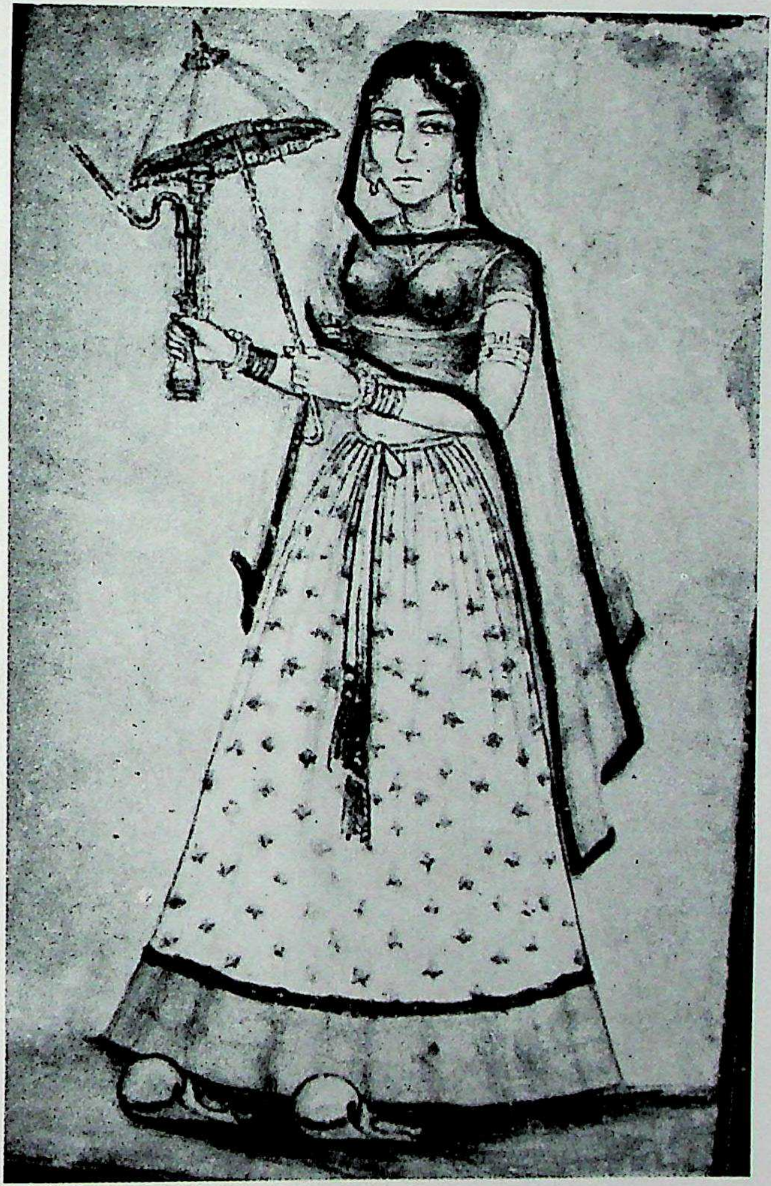
VIII Saadat Ali Khan



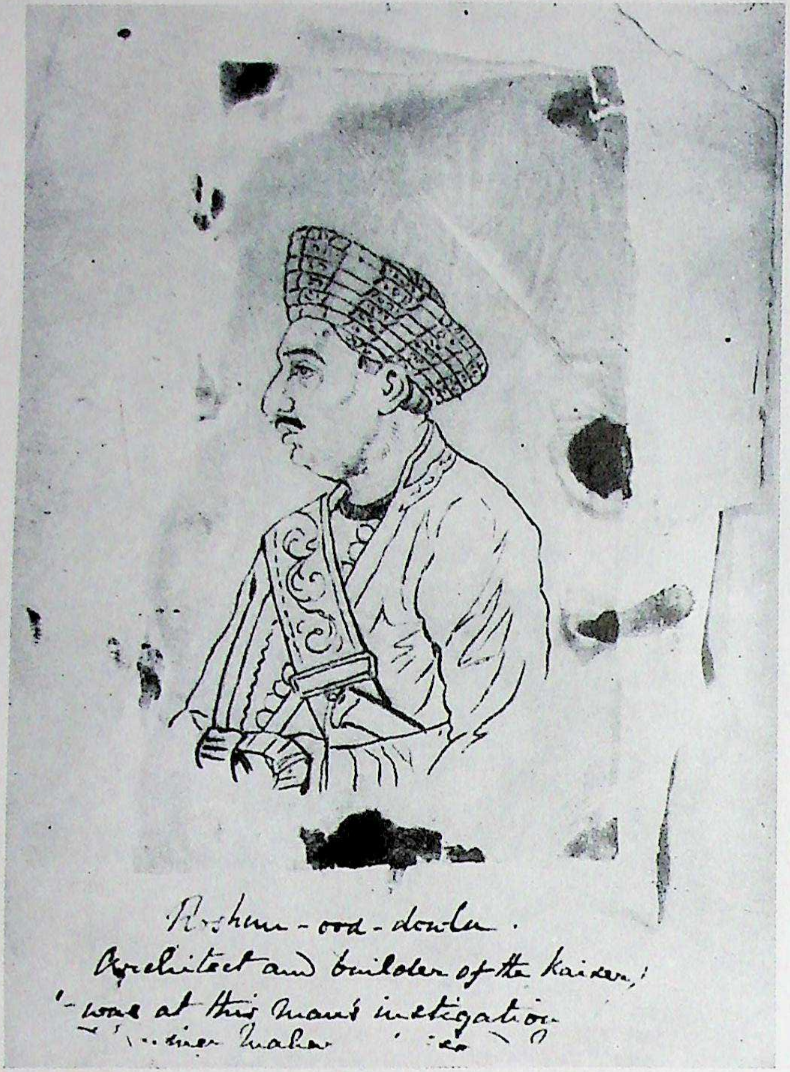
IX King Ghaziuddin Haider.



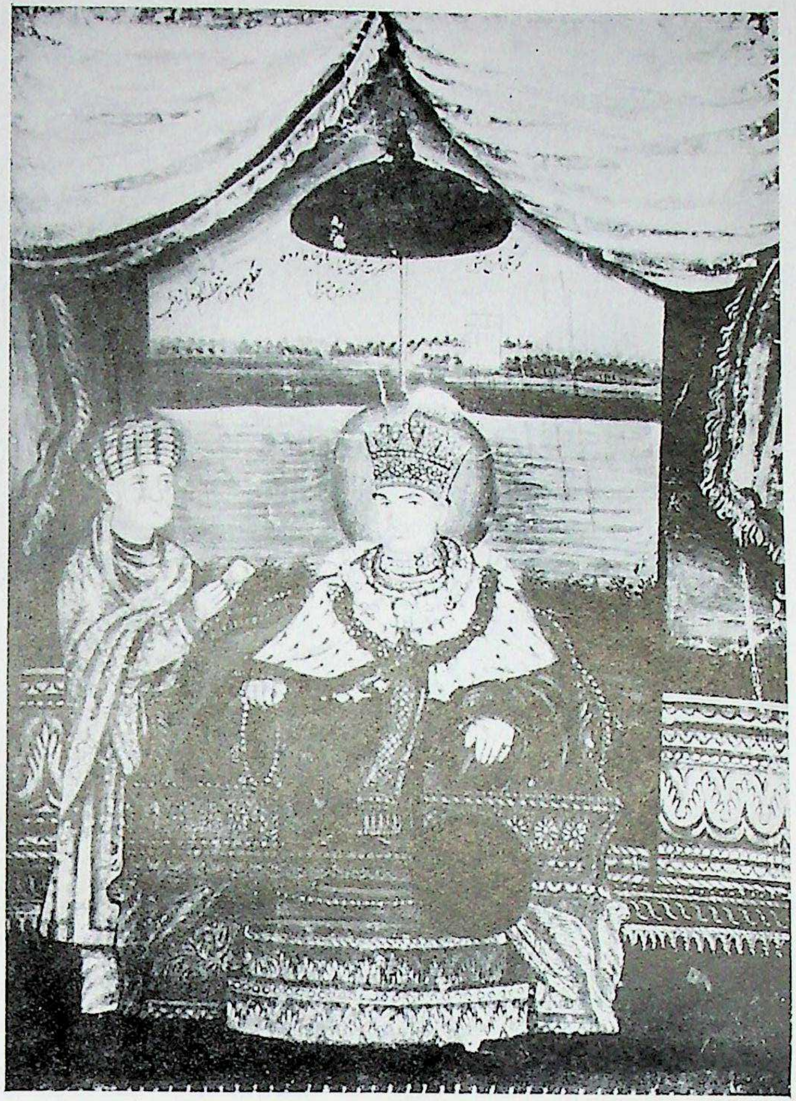
X Nasiruddin Haider



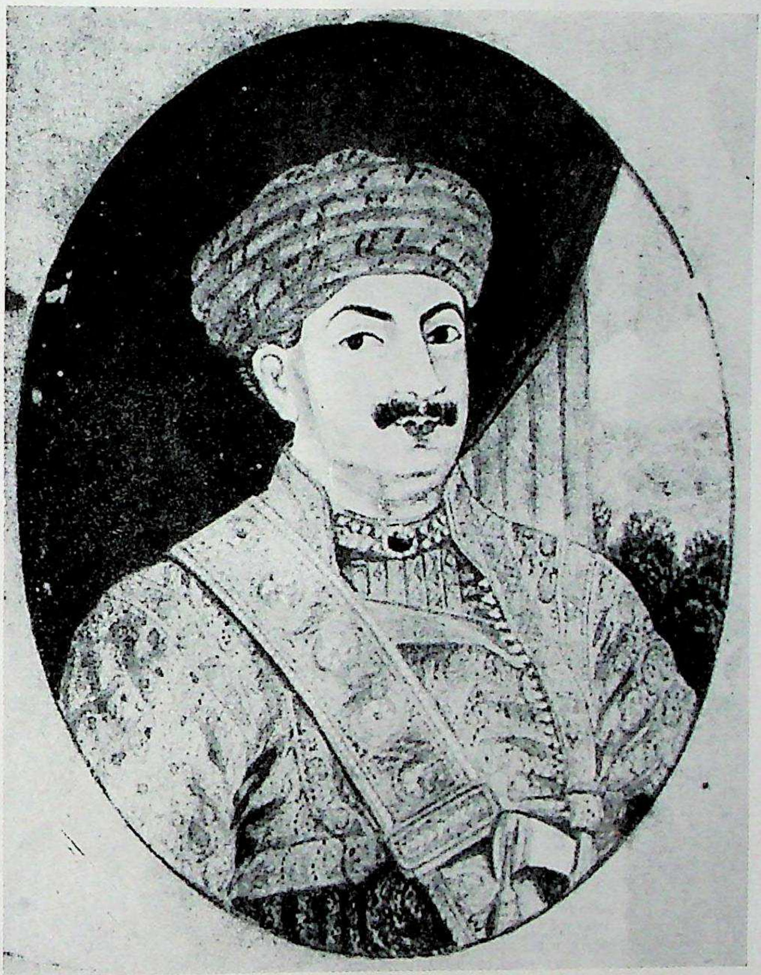
XI Dhania Kahari


Roshun-ood-dowla.
Architect and builder of the Kaiser;
-was at this man's instigation
[illegible] Mahal [illegible]

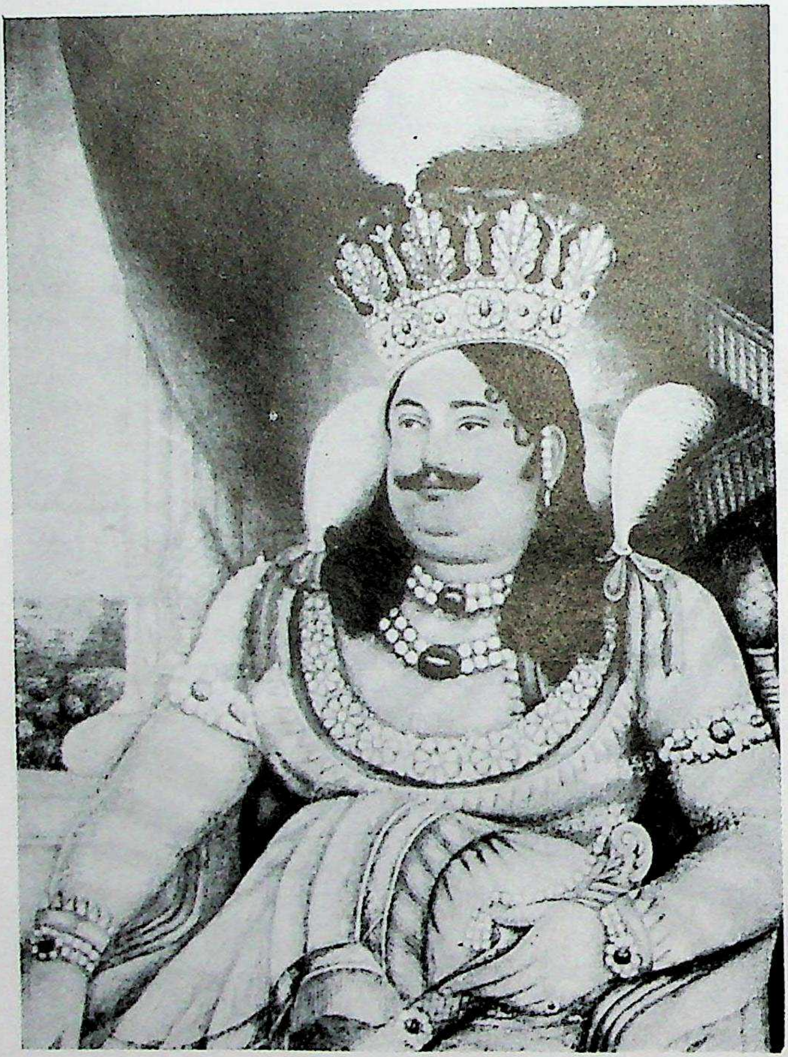
XI A Roshanuddaulah



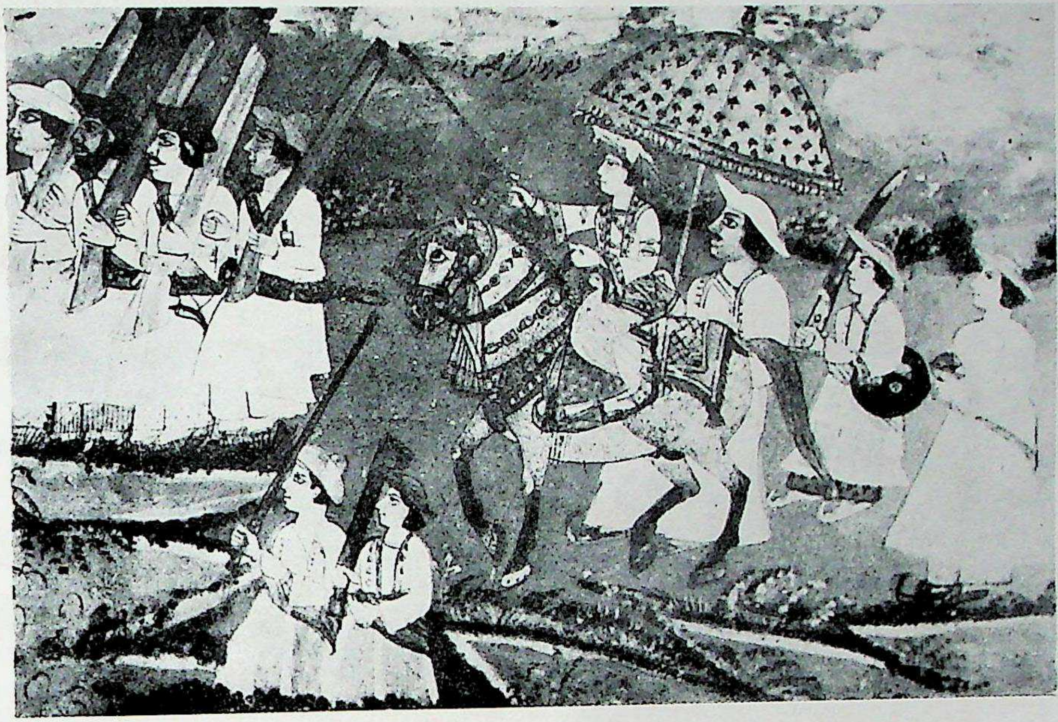
XII Mohammad Ali Shah with his Vizier Hakim Mahdi.
The Farrah Bux Palace has been portrayed in the background.



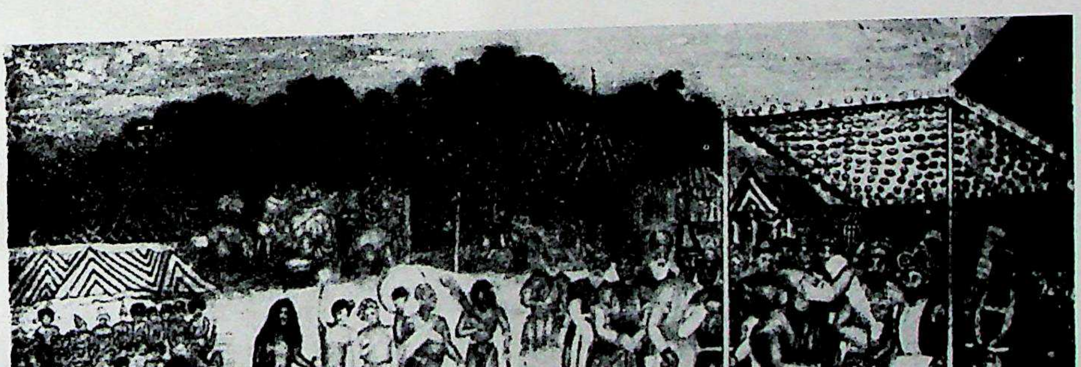
XIII Amjad Ali Shah



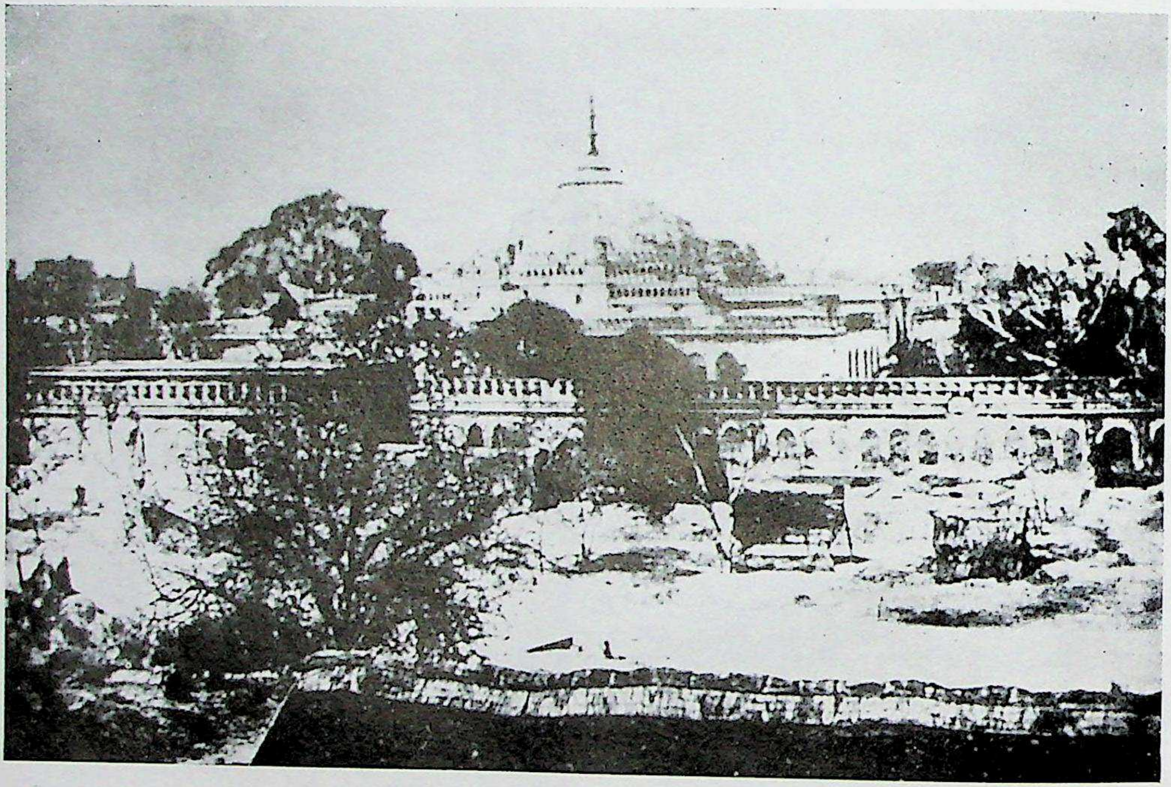
XIV Wajid Ali Shah



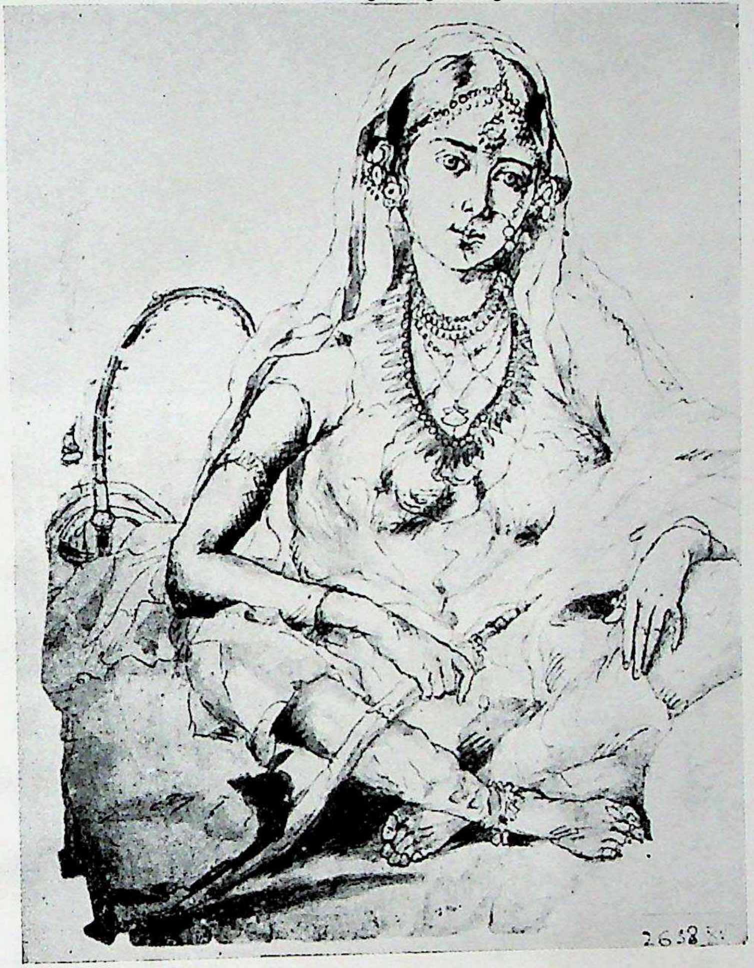
XV King Birjis Qadar



XVI Coronation of a king of Avadh

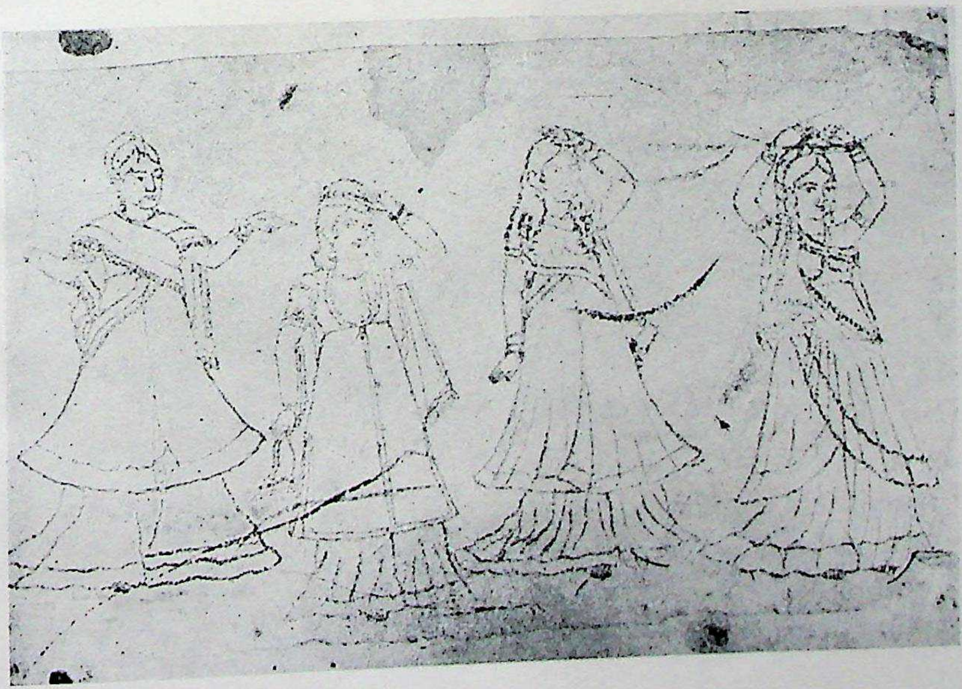


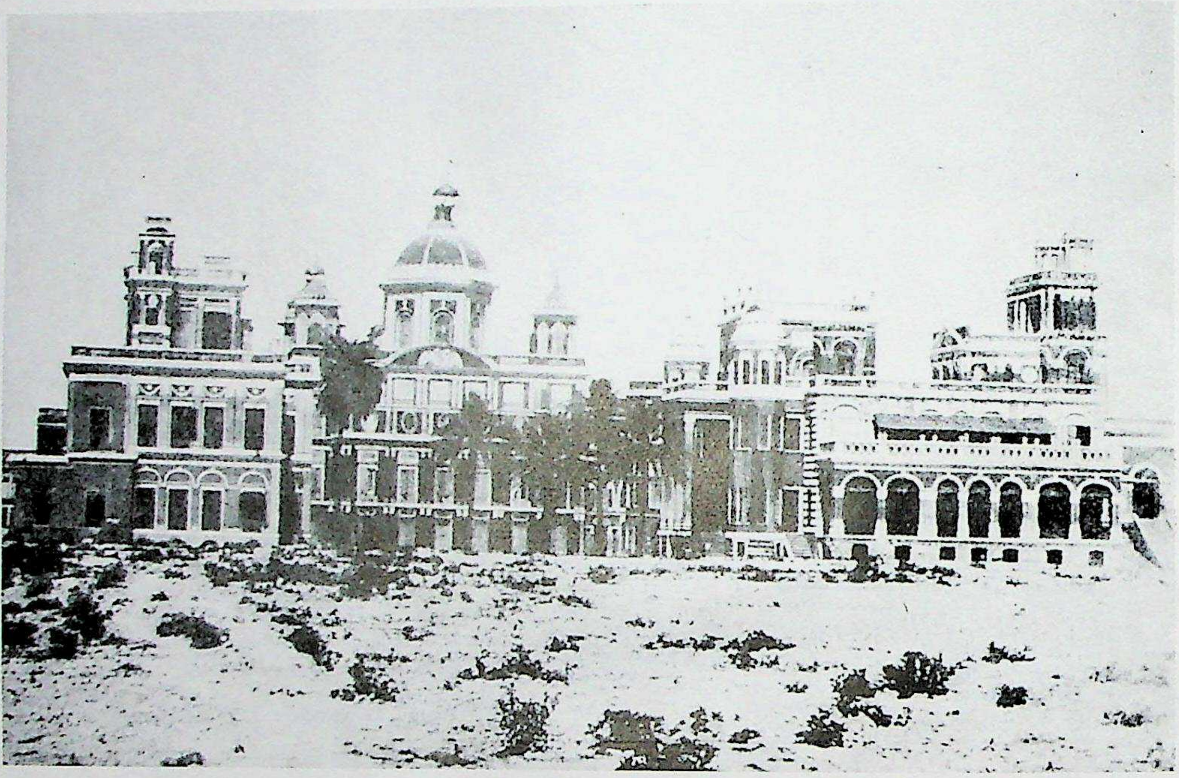
XVII Shahnajaf



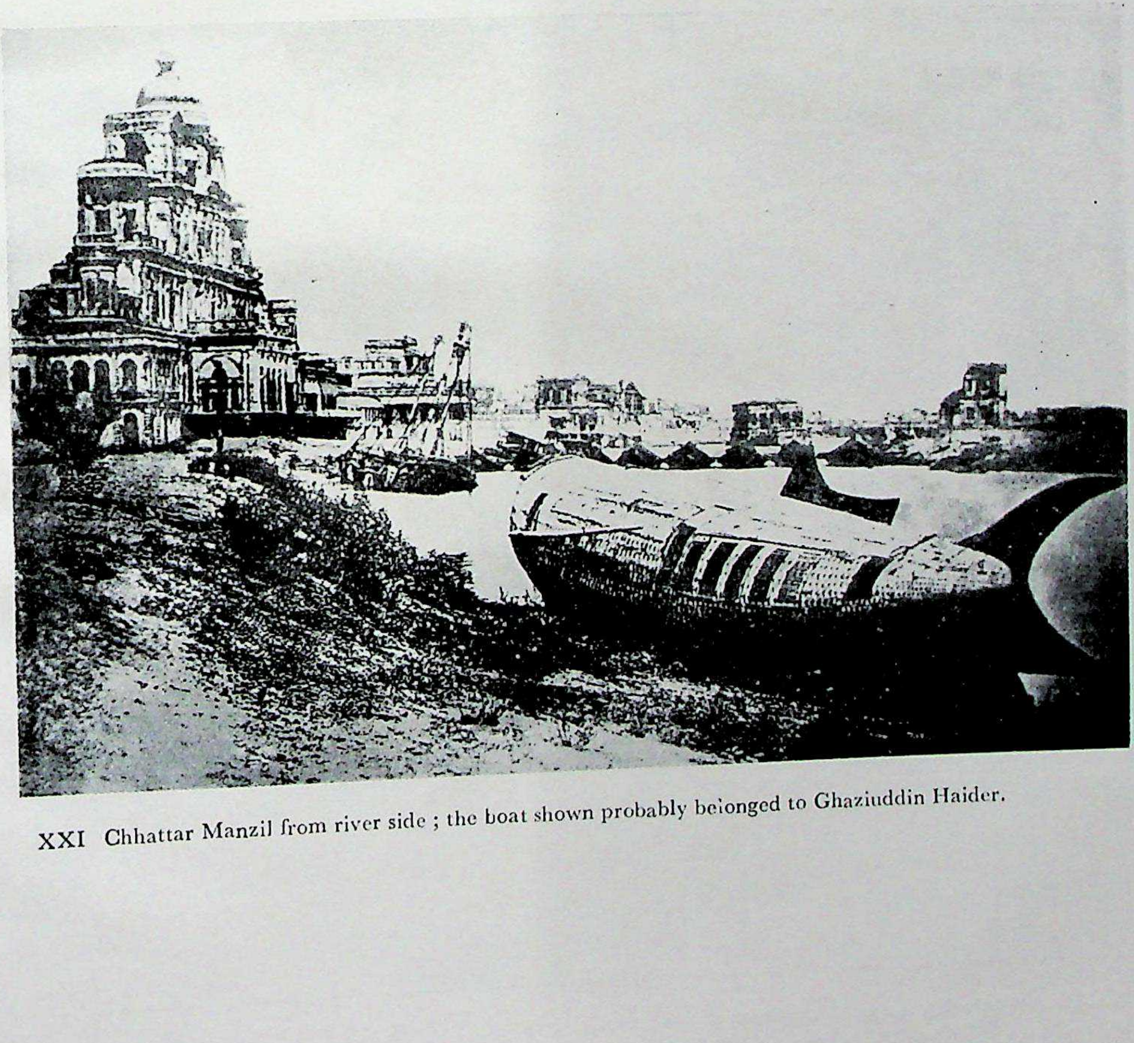
XVIII A dancing girl (1850 A.D.)

XIX Dancers (1850 A.D.)
↓

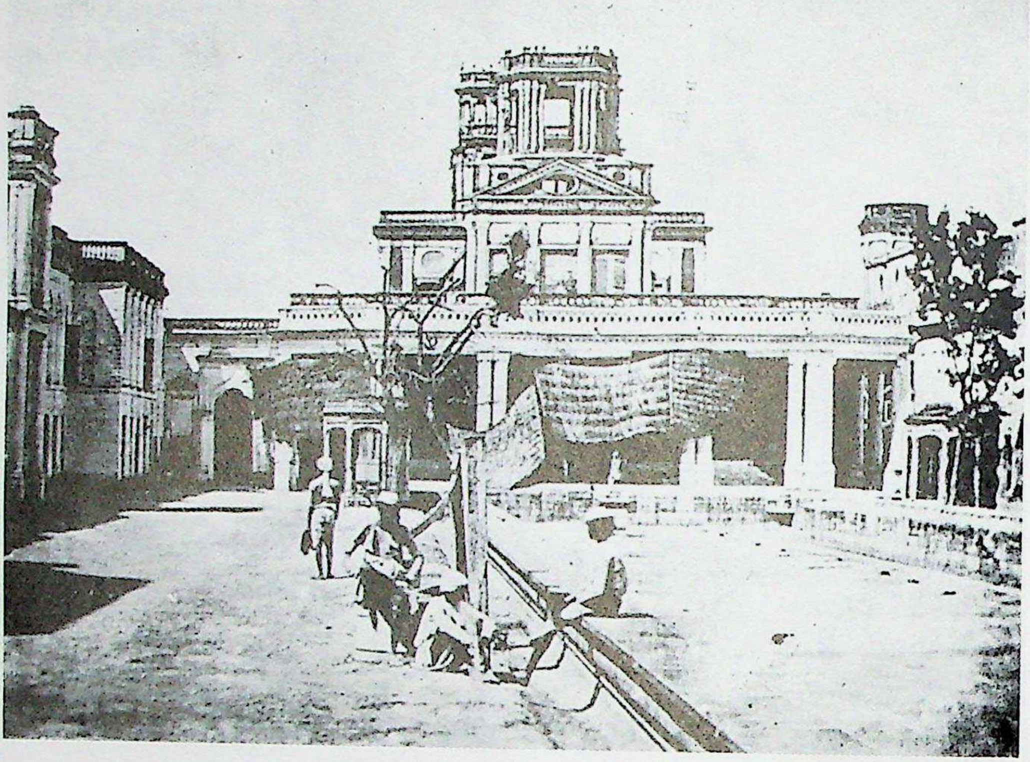




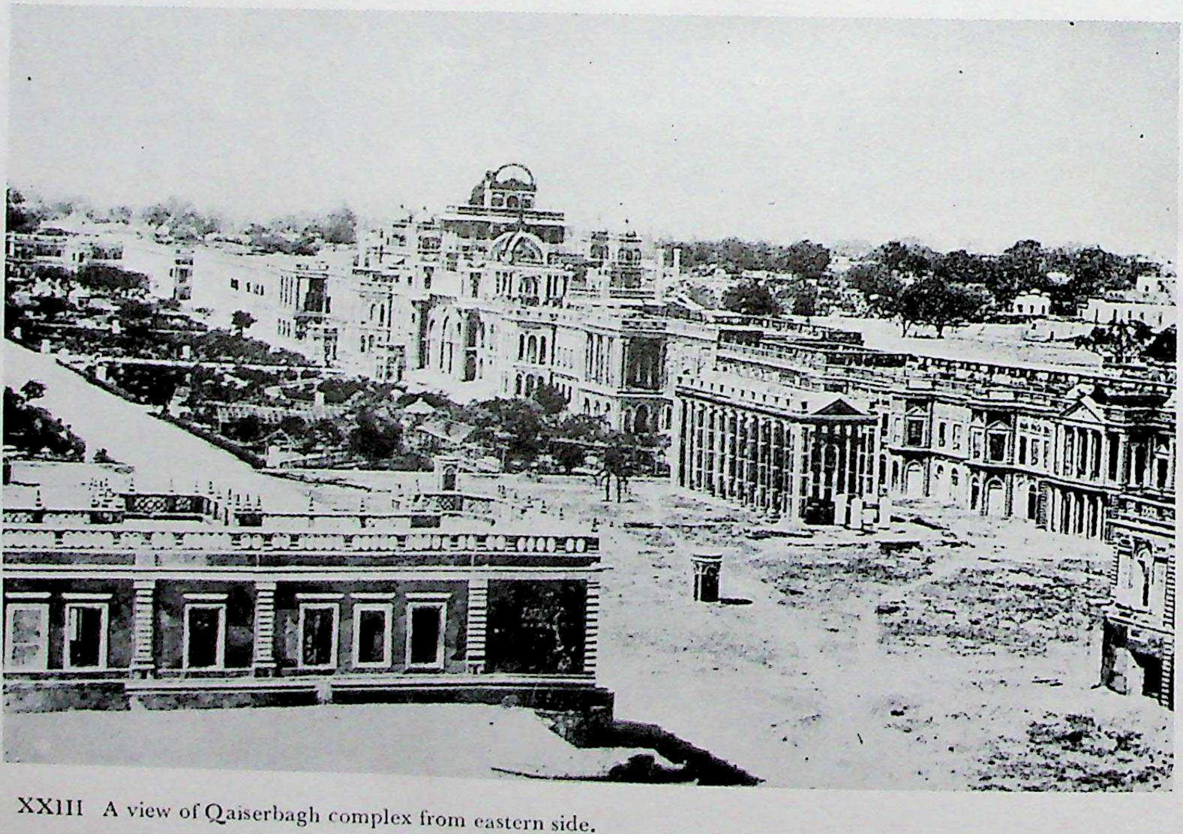
XX Farrah Bux Palace, Gulshane Aram and Aish Mahal.



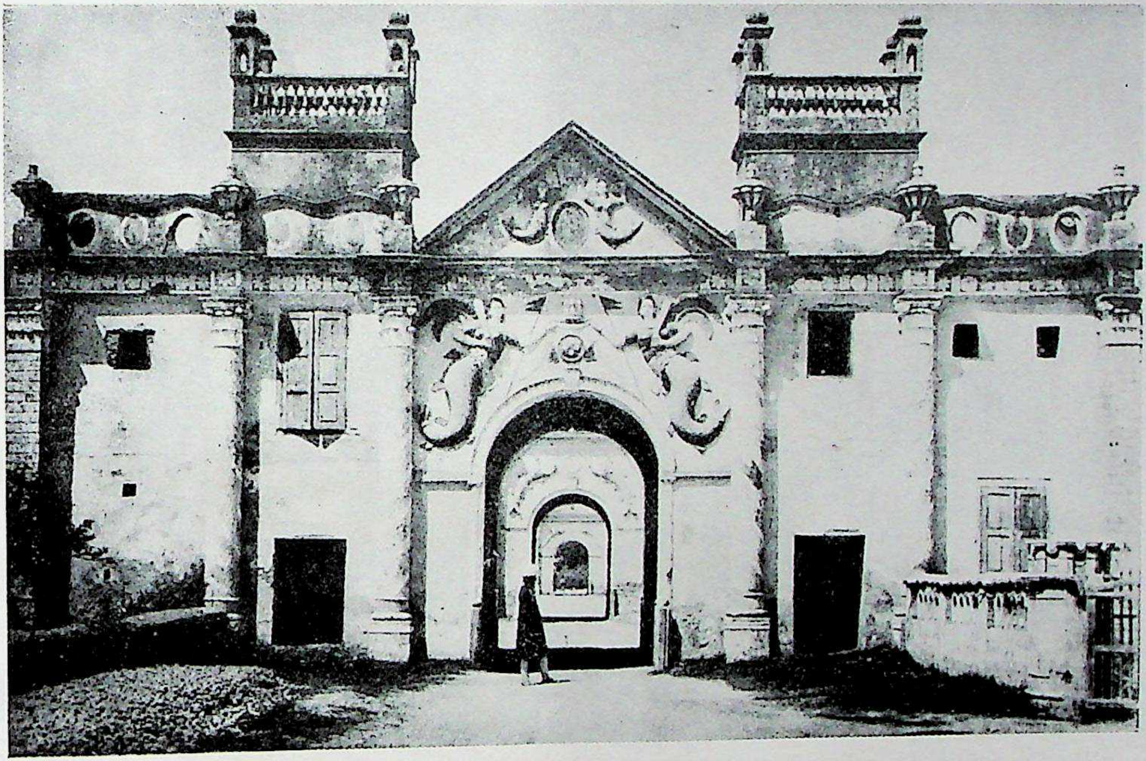
XXI Chhattar Manzil from river side ; the boat shown probably belonged to Ghaziuddin Haider.



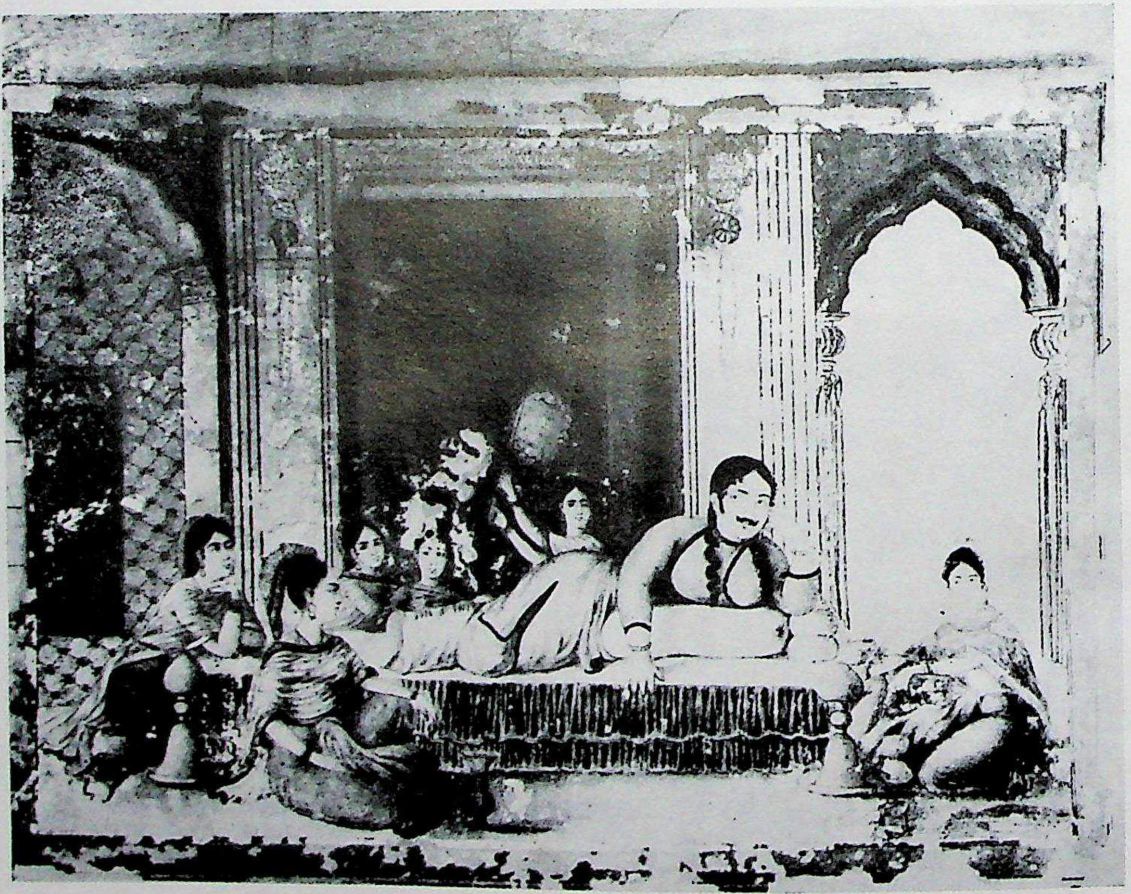
XXII Courtyard between Farrah Bux and Chhattar Manzil.



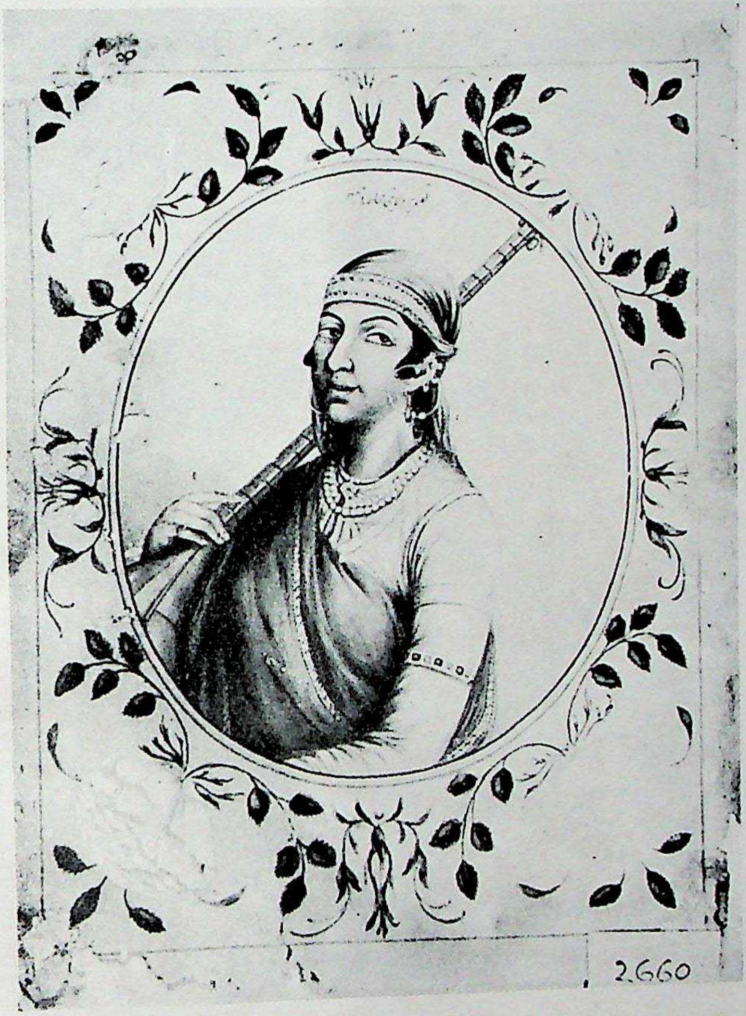
XXIII A view of Qaiserbagh complex from eastern side.



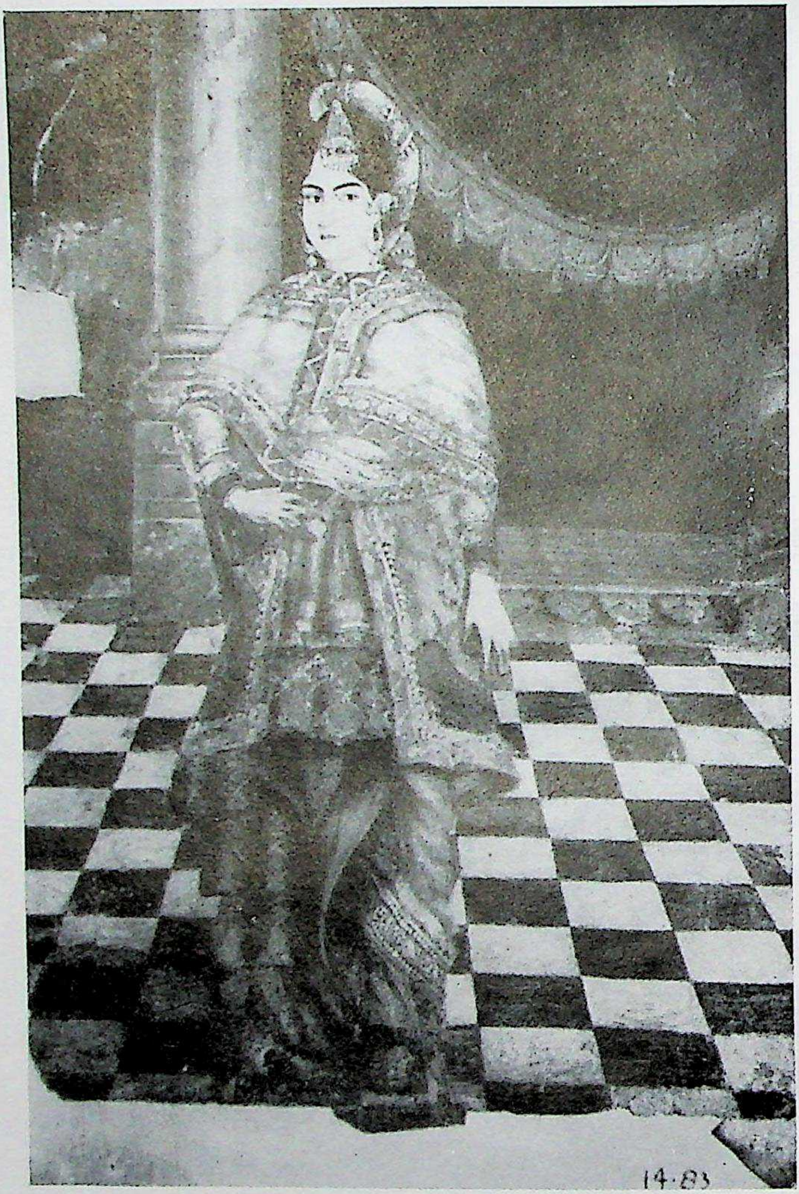
XXIII A. Mermaid Gate



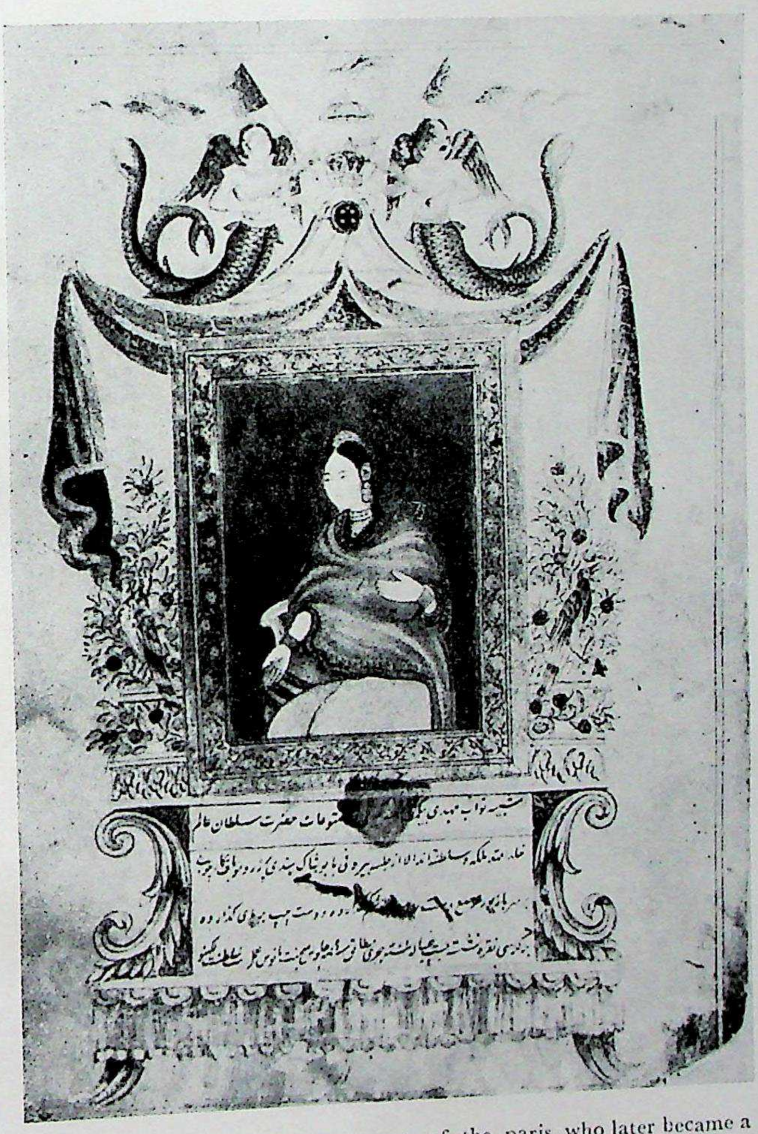
XXIV Wazid Ali Shah in the harem.



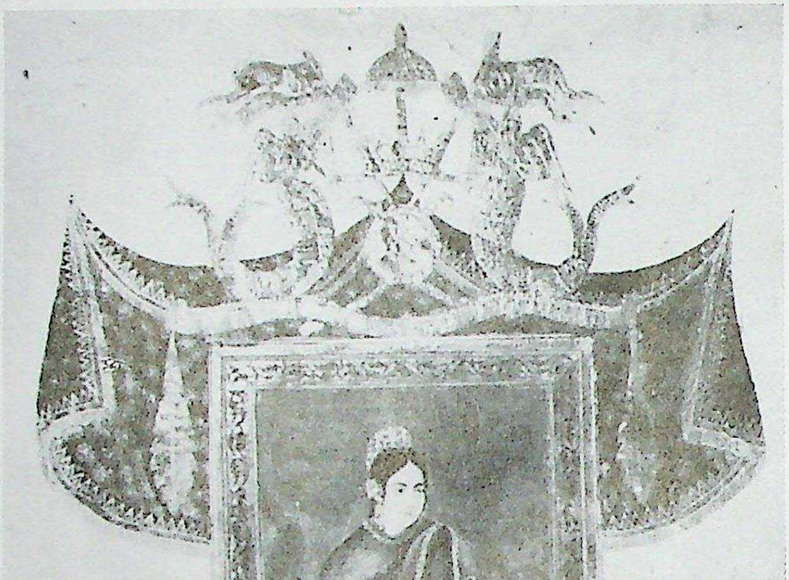
XXV Vilaiti Mahal



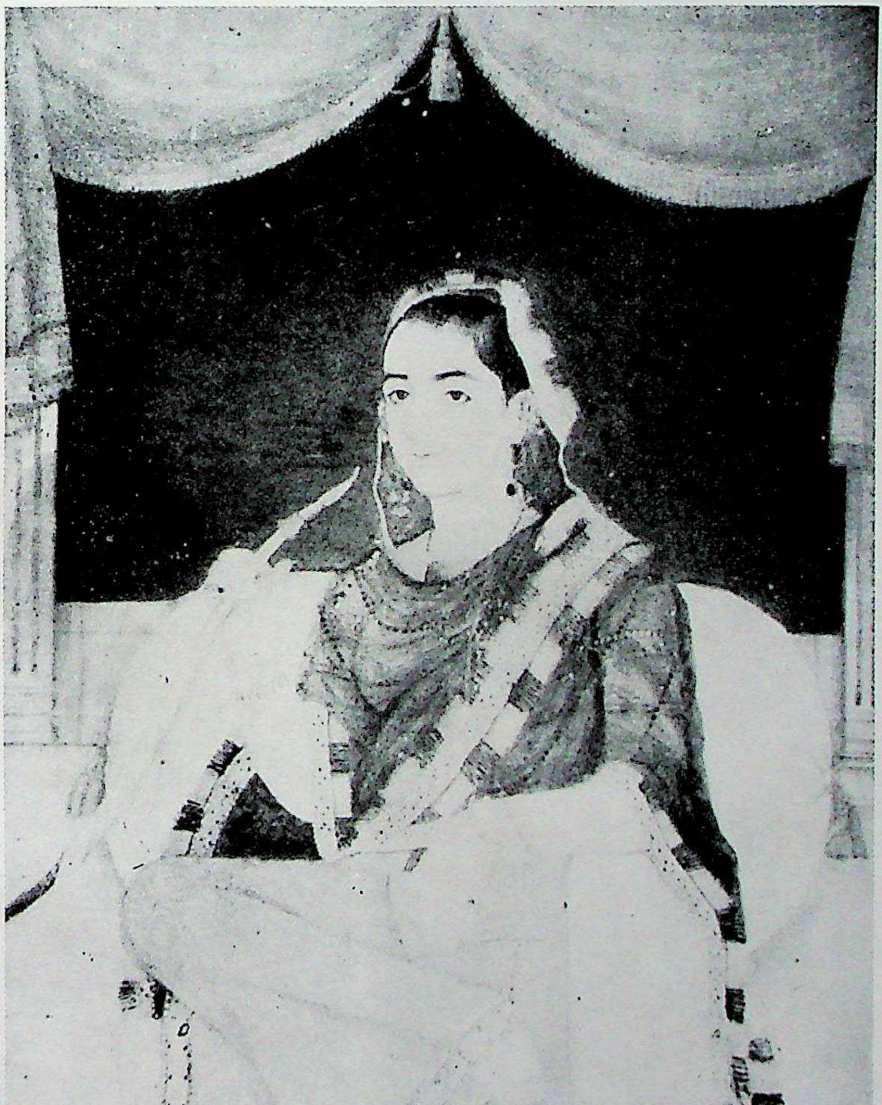
XXVII Portrait of a Begum



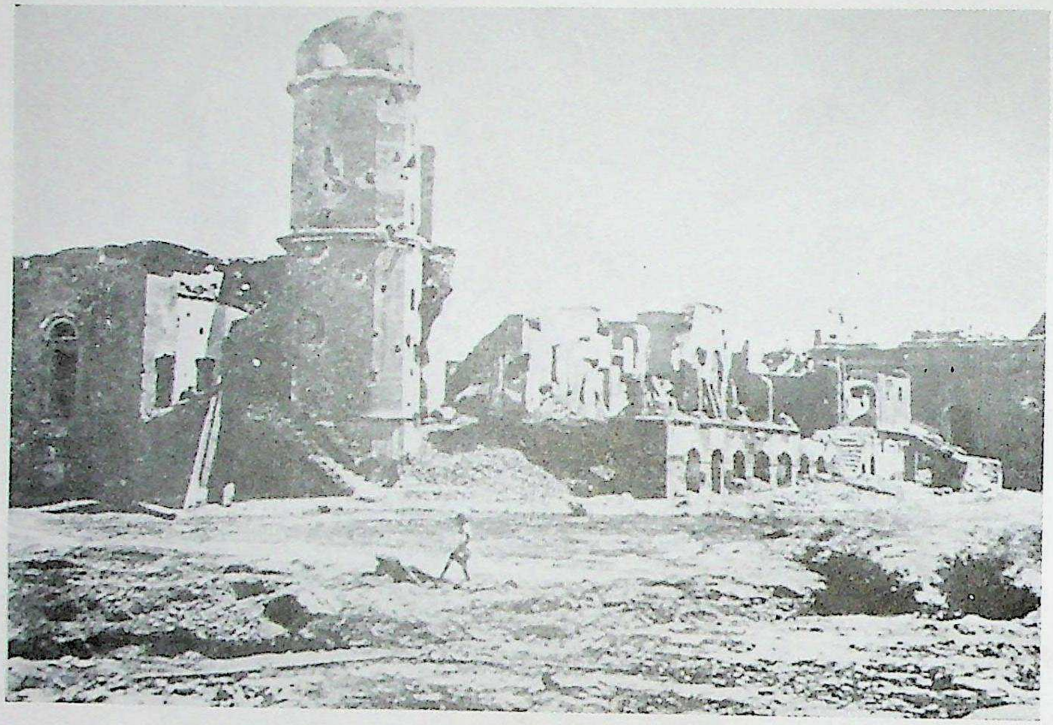
XXVIII Nawab Mahdi Begum, one of the paris who later became a mamtua begum of Wajid Ali Shah.



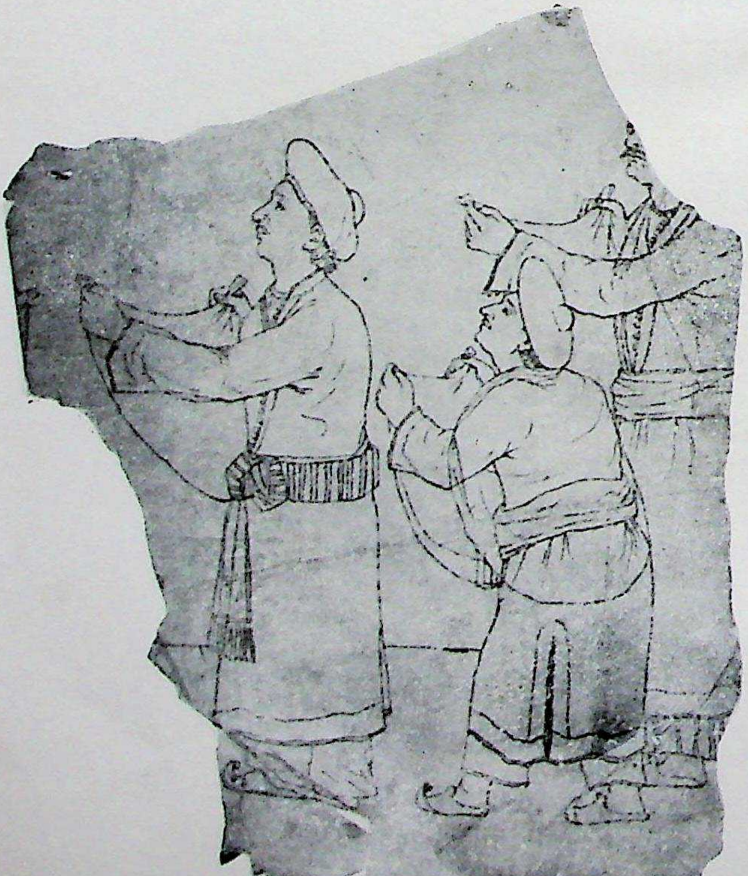
XXIX Nawab Sahabzadi Begum, one of the paris who became a mamtua begum of Wajid Ali Shah.



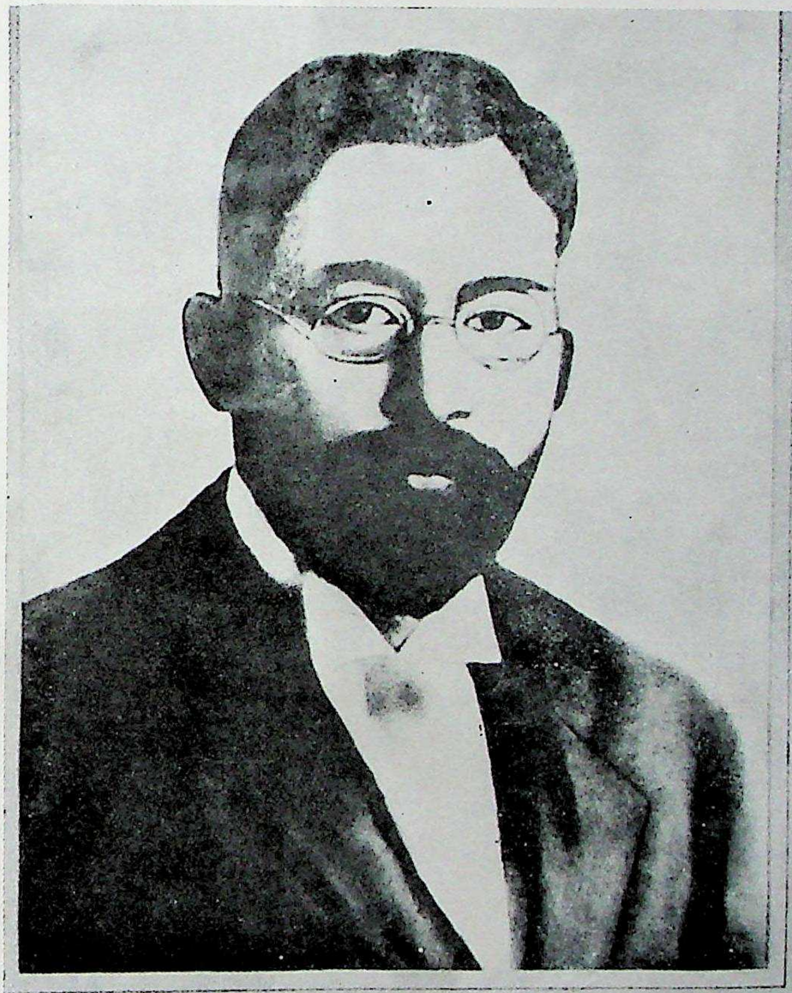
XXX Nawab Bahu Begum.



↑
XXXI The Residency with its Tower.



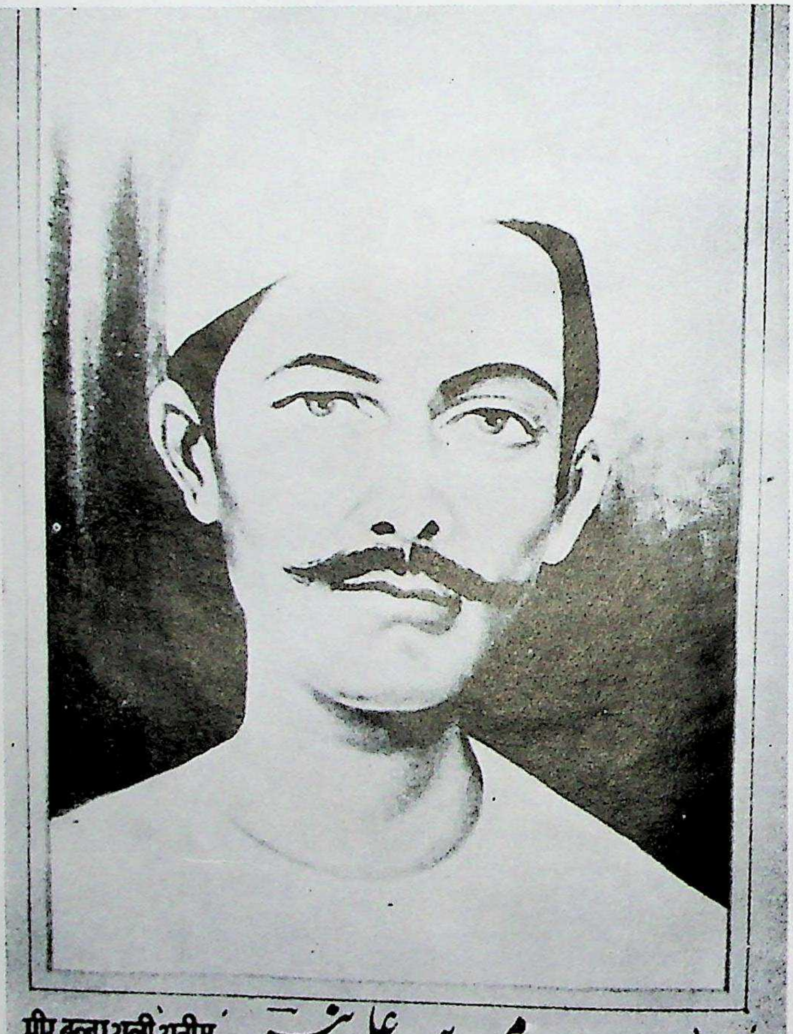
XXXII Beggars of Lucknow.



ABDUL HALIM 'SHARAR'
1860 —— 1926

مولانا عبدالحلیم شرر
۱۸۶۰ء —— ۱۹۲۶ء

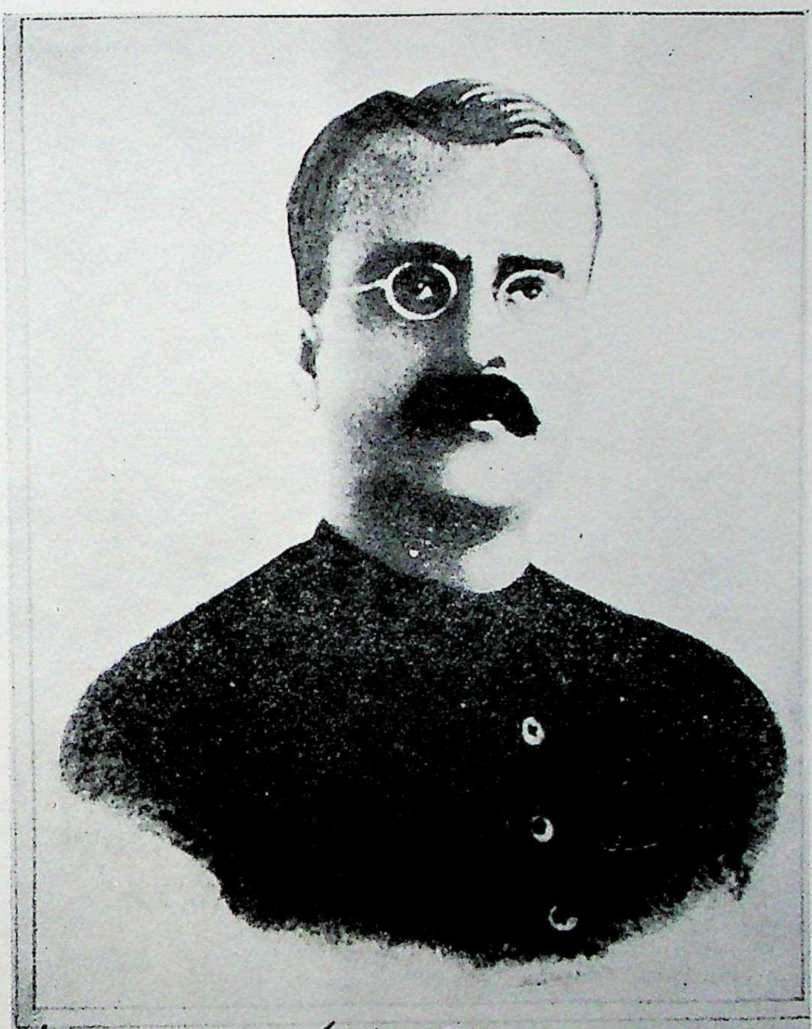
अब्दुल हलीम 'शरर'
1860 —— 1926



मीर बब्बर अली अनीस
1802 —— 1874

میر ببر علی انیس
۱۸۰۲ء —— ۱۸۷۴ء

MIR BABBAR ALI ANIS
1802 —— 1874



बृज नारायण चकबस्त
1882——1926

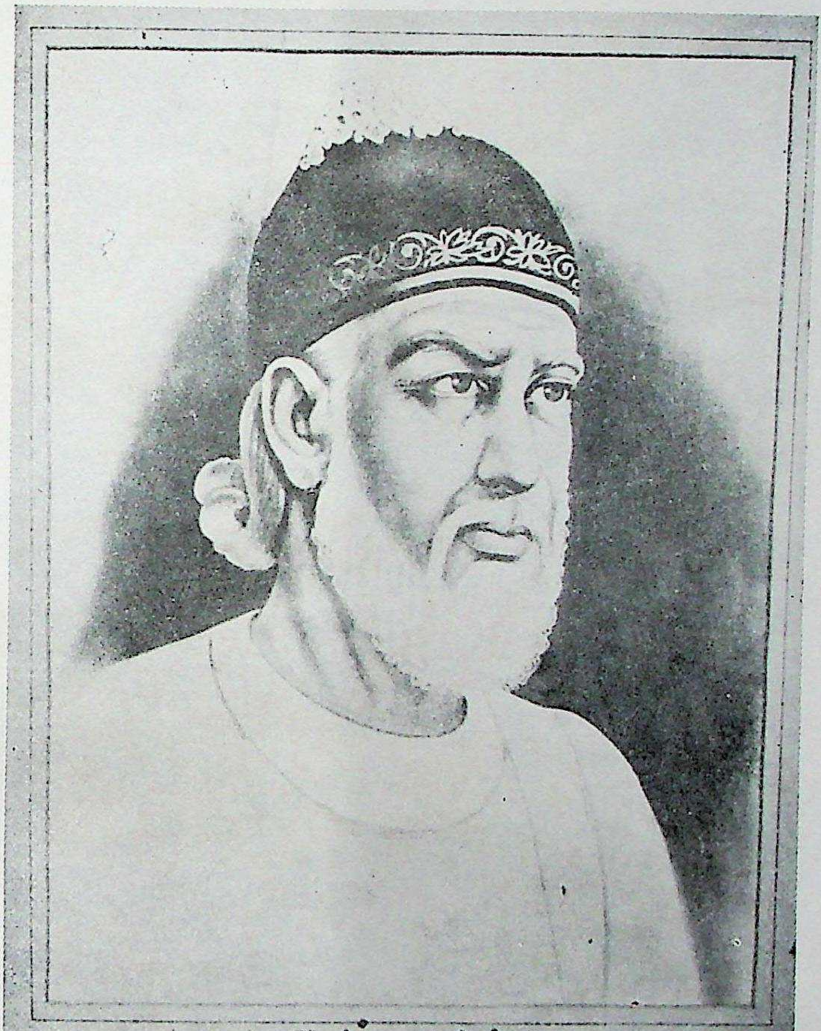
پنڈت برج نرائن چکبست
۱۸۸۲ء——۱۹۲۶ء

BRIJ NARAIN CHAKBAST
1882——1926

रतन नाथ 'सरशार'
1846 — 1902

پنڈت رتن ناتھ سرشار
۱۸۴۶ء ——— ۱۹۰۲ء

RATAN NATH SARSHAR
1846 — 1902



GHULAM HAMADANI MUSHAFI
1750 —— 1824

شیخ غلام ہمدانی مصحفی
۱۸۲۴ء —— ۱۷۵۰ء

गुलाम हमदानी मुसहफ़ी
1750 —— 1824

सलामत अली 'दबीर'
1803 —— 1875

مرزا سلامت علی دبیر
۱۸۰۳ —— ۱۸۷۵

SALAMAT ALI 'DABEER'
1803 —— 1875

Munshi Nawal Kishore (1836-1895) →

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